

# A HERO OF DONEGAL

A MEMOIR OF  
DR WILLIAM SMYTH OF  
BURTONPORT

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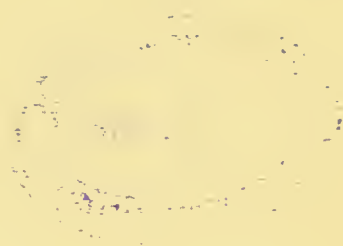


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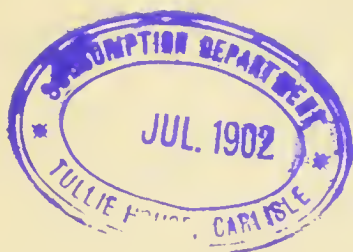
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A HERO OF DONEGAL









Dr. William Smyth  
*(Aylton, photo, Londonderry)*

*Frontispiece*

# HERO OF DONEGAL

DR. WILLIAM SMYTH

FREDERICK DOUGLASS HOW

"I HAVE HEARD THAT" "I HAVE HEARD THAT"  
"I HAVE HEARD THAT" "I HAVE HEARD THAT"

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"NOBLE WOMEN OF OUR TIME"

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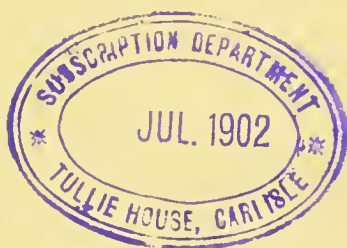


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## CHAPTER I

### THE ROSSES AND THEIR PEOPLE

FAR away in the extreme north-west of Ireland is the district of the Rosses. "Ross" has two meanings in that country. In the south it suggests a wood, as for instance the well-known Muckcross at Killarney. In the north it means a peninsula, and nothing could better describe the portion of Co. Donegal which goes by the name of "the Rosses." It is indeed a land of peninsulas. Not only along the coast, where it is often hard to tell whether a long low rocky shore is a veritable island or is joined to the mainland by a narrow neck, but all through the country between the bays of Gweebarra and Gweedore is this the case. Countless loughs, for the most part narrow and intricate, wind amongst the rocks and hills. Often the road passes close between the shores of two of them,

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and has to bend and turn to suit their involutions, so that the traveller has a constant feeling that the ground over which he passes is indeed "almost an island."

Some few English people know and love the district well. Some know it well and love it little. The fisherman who has been there once looks forward with keenness to his summer holiday that he may again throw fly on those teeming waters, where he may fill his basket with trout, or, more ambitious, may take his chance of an occasional salmon. The painter who finds his "subjects" in sea and rock, or moorland and still pool, sets up his easel with the happy reflection that no brother of the brush is likely to have forestalled him. For the mere tourist in search of new scenery and fresh sensations the country has its charm. There is a marvellous wildness and sense of freedom even on the more frequented mainland, while if he explore the islands he will find these things intensified amidst even greater beauty. But these are not to be visited except by leave of the elements, and it is on those days when the north-west wind is raising a tempest in the narrow "roads" between the islands that the

## THE ROSSES AND THEIR PEOPLE

most magnificent sights are to be witnessed. Button up your coat and face the storm. Take the road from the little harbour of Burtonport that leads northward by Lough Waskel towards Keadew. Then bend your head and face the full fury of the wind as you turn along a cart track which leads seawards, and, when you find yourself upon some knoll of grass and rock, steady yourself as best you may and look out to Aughnish Point off Cruit and beyond to Owey Island. You will be well rewarded. The blue grey sea rushing before the strong nor'-wester dashes itself against the rocky coast, and the white spray leaps to what appears a height incredible. Should your eyes be able to stand the strain, and should your position be favourable, it is possible that a still further gleam of spray will show you where lie the Three Stags—rocks which lift their heads out of the water north-west again from Owey. The superstition is that these are three Spanish ships, a part of the great Armada, and that some day they will sail away, when heaven knows what disaster will ensue. So general is this belief that only a few years ago, when three freight boats from Glasgow were sighted not far from the spot, a little lad

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ran home in consternation shouting, "The Stags are away! The Stags are away!"

But it is not only on a day of storm that the land of the Rosses is beautiful. A still evening when the sun is getting low is a chance to see that Nature here is exquisite in her repose. The grey boulders are set like uncut jewels in the ruddy gold of the grass and rushes. The islands lie purple and quiet on the gleaming waters. The distant mountains of a greyer hue carry the eye and often the heart of man to the borders of the infinite. The gulls, no longer storm-tossed or struggling vainly to beat up against the wind, fly lazily, or stand demurely on the water's edge. There is a sense of peace, and, at first, of loneliness. But look again. What is that low brown object peeping over yonder boulder? It is a thatch. What is that faint blue film rising to the right, and what that gleam of light close by you to the left? They are the smoke from the chimney of one house and the lamp already lighted in the window of another. Look round, look behind, look on all sides, and soon it becomes evident that these little long low houses with their grey and white walls and weather-stained thatch are *everywhere*.

## THE ROSSES AND THEIR PEOPLE

It is the strangest sensation. The solitude is suddenly peopled, and it is borne in upon you that you are standing in a "congested district"—one of those districts which the Secretaries for Ireland visit in their tours and which cause them the gravest perplexities, and to which the officials of the Congested Districts Board have to give their closest attention and most arduous labours.

But to return to the appearance of the country itself. How is it that the numberless houses are so little in evidence that the impression of a wild and uninhabited land is at first produced? There are two reasons. First, the colour of these long, low houses (all devoid of an upper storey) so exactly blends with their surroundings. The yellow and brown of the thatch is often invisible against the yellow and brown of the rushes and grass. The grey stone and the white walls, often marked with green stains from the damp, are a repetition in colour of the grey-and-white boulders with their patches of moss and lichen. Secondly, there are no fences. What the casual observer has at first mistaken for bits of brown bog turn out to be the potato patches, spade-dug by the little farmers. These

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

have nothing to separate them from the rest of the hill-side, and consequently it is impossible for any sheep to be kept, though the quality of the grass which crops up between the boulders suggests that they would alone of all animals find their living out of it. Neither are there any pigs! The general idea that the pig pays the rent receives a rude blow here. "There is not enough to keep a pig" is the reason given for their absence. A cow, a horse, a donkey, quantities of fowls and ducks, all may be found sharing the living room of these houses, but a pig never. There *are* sheep in the district, but it is only where a large tract of uninhabited land, such as the hill-tops of Arranmore, may here and there be found. The colour of the houses and the absence of fences accounts, then, in great measure for the uninhabited appearance of the country. It is necessary to go out just after dark to get an impression of the swarming population. Neither shutters nor blinds are known there, and it is the custom of the country to put a lamp in the window as soon as darkness sets in. This effectually prevents the passer-by from seeing what is going on indoors, and the gleam from



## THE ROSSES AND THEIR PEOPLE

these countless lamps is perhaps the only thing that will convince the stranger of the number of habitations dotted about all over that apparently wild and desolate land.

Of the character of the people one word must be said. The recognised Irish virtues and Irish failings are strongly in evidence. They find a remarkable combination in the frequent case of a family thriftless and slovenly, living in the most comfortless and insanitary surroundings, but taking life with a cheeriness with which Mark Tapley alone could compete. Of whisky there is, at the present moment, a smaller consumption than is commonly the case, owing to the splendid work carried on by a Roman Catholic Temperance Mission. Of idleness there is enough and to spare. Within the limits of a day or two it happened to the present writer first to send for a man to help to row a boat. It was half-past ten in the morning. The messenger came back to say the man was in bed, but would dress himself and come. Next, a smith was wanted to see to a horse's shoes. The car drove up to the forge at a quarter-past nine. No one was stirring. The smith was not yet out of bed, and had to be aroused from his morning slumber !

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

There are, too, a great many men whose day's work on their tiny farm—not larger, perhaps, than a good-sized cottage garden in England—is of so light a kind that they get into a pernicious habit of sitting or strolling about doing nothing. “What does So-and-so do for his living?” asked a stranger. “Och! he just wa-alks about,” was the reply. But this state of things is getting better all the while. The Congested Districts Board has already done wonders in improving the sea-fishing, and in other matters too, and a busier and more wholesome life is beginning to be led by the inhabitants.

In appearance the people are a fine, good-looking race, especially upon the island of Arranmore. Any idea of the comic Irishman of the stage may be dismissed at once. Most of the men are well set up, bronzed, and hardy looking, with an expression of countenance usually serious and even a little sad, but which lights up with a kindly smile even for the benefit of the Saxon visitor. The women are dark-haired and well grown, and have the good complexions found in moist climates. Some few have beautiful dark-red hair, and there is a

## THE ROSSES AND THEIR PEOPLE

curious superstition which makes it unlucky for a man to meet a red-haired woman when on his way to the boats. In bad weather a shawl is the regular head covering of the women, but in good weather or when the hair is carefully dressed for a visit nothing at all is worn over it. Occasionally a barefooted girl may be seen going in and out of a house, busy with her homely duties, but at the present day *all* possess shoes and stockings, and mostly wear them. This practice dates possibly from the increased prosperity of the fisheries during the last few years.

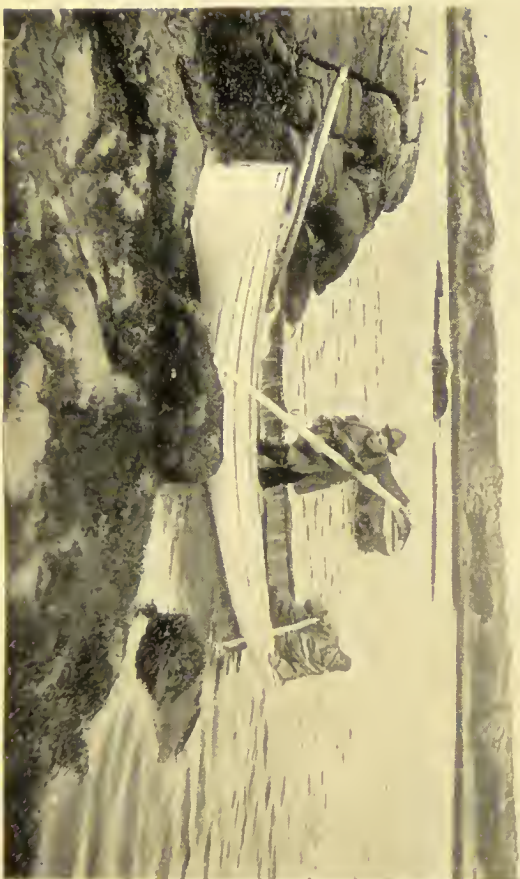
Of the religion of the people it is only necessary to say that not more than three or four per cent. are Protestants, the rest being Roman Catholics, and apparently devout attendants at the services which they attend.

In the course of this little book other characteristics will no doubt appear. It has been necessary to give the foregoing short account of the place and the people in order that some idea may be obtained of the surroundings amongst which Dr. Smyth lived and worked.

## CHAPTER II

BURTONPORT—WILLIAM SMYTH'S EARLY  
LIFE — MOUNT CHARLES — RAPHOE —  
TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN—HIS FIRST  
DISPENSARY AT ARDARA

Just about half-way down the coast line of the Rosses, measuring from the Bay of Gweedore on the north to that of Gweebarra on the south, is the fishing village of Burtonport. There are three ways by which it may be approached. First and chiefest is by sea, for it is as a port and centre of the herring fisheries that the place is rising to notoriety. To bring a steamship up to the little pier it is necessary to obtain the services of a local pilot, for the course to be steered is by no means easy. Some three miles off lies the large island of Arranmore, about which more will have to be said presently, while between this island and Burtonport are those of



Near Burtonport

*(from a photograph by W. A. Puley, Esq.)*



## BURTONPORT

Rutland,\* Innishcoo, and Edernish, low-lying, rocky and barren, with shoals and submerged rocks innumerable, the exact locality of which none but a native can thoroughly master. The other two routes by which Burtonport may be approached are by the north road from Gweedore, or that from the south through Dunglow (pronounced Dunlow), a little town of one steep street, situated at the head of a shallow arm of the sea about four Irish miles away.

Burtonport itself is almost invisible from whichever side it is approached. In fact it seems to have altogether escaped the notice of the makers of the one-inch Ordnance Survey, for, while a dot or two suggest that some houses exist there, no name can be discovered. This state of things will doubtless soon be altered, for the place bids fair to eclipse Dunglow in importance, and is to be the terminus of a new railway which nears completion. There is but one street in Burtonport, and this, approaching from inland, after climbing a slight hill runs

\* So-called from the fact that during the Lord-Lieutenancy of the Duke of Rutland in 1785, £40,000 was spent in building a military station and general store on the island. All trace of these has now disappeared.

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rapidly down to the stone pier and tiny harbour, where it abruptly ends. At the present day there are all the signs of a place that is beginning to grow. Sundry brand-new storehouses of plain design have arisen and are rising. Why is it, by the way, that in the most beautiful scenery of our land—in Scotland, Ireland and Wales—the architecture is so uniformly ugly? Certainly here, in this far-off land of island, rock, and gleaming waters, the more pretentious buildings have little to commend them. Among other new erections is the commodious Coastguard Station which lies back a little from the road on the right-hand side. Not far from it are the police barracks, and here and there on both sides of the street are to be seen various “Stores,” and the long wooden sheds in which the herring-curing is carried on. These “Stores” are regular “Whiteleys” in a small way. Every conceivable thing can be bought there, and one thing which to the English mind is *inconceivable*, for in each one there is a counter set apart for the sale and consumption of strong drink. It is a crying shame that neither man nor woman can go to a store to buy an ounce of tobacco or a packet of tea without having the temptation before them of spending



## BURTONPORT

the change on a glass of whisky. It is a curious sight to look in at the open door of one of these "Stores" after dark on a winter evening. The hanging lamps throw a lurid light on the coloured wrappers and labels of tinned provisions, bottles, and the piled-up contents of the shelves behind the counter. The shopmen in their shirt-sleeves pass backwards and forwards as they serve the customers, or, frequently, lean upon the counter and chat with the groups of bronzed fishermen, who find the place a warm and tempting lounge. The whole standing-room is filled with these men, smoking, arguing, laughing, and now and then (but not often) quarrelling. The scenes described in books about the mining camps in California come unbidden to one's mind, for the groups of men in the crowded store, where whisky-drinking goes hand-in-hand with the purchase of the ordinary necessities of life, are part of the picture with which we are familiar in the history of newly settled communities.

Just before the street reaches the last little descent to the pier a patch of greensward and a white gate catch the eye. A smart gravel drive leads down from here to the house of the agent

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of the Marquess Conyngham, a large landowner in the Rosses, whose principal seat is Slane Castle in Co. Meath, but who has a second place at Mount Charles on Donegal Bay.

This brings us to the beginning of our story, for it was at Mount Charles that William Smyth was born on March 30, 1859, and it was at the agent's house at Burtonport, then occupied by Mr. W. Hammond, that some of his happiest holidays were spent in his schoolboy years. He was the eldest son of Dr. Samuel Smyth, a native of Ardgrey, Raphoe, and his mother—still living—was the daughter of the late Mr. Hugh Scott of Mount Charles, a lovely spot looking southwards over Donegal Bay. He was one of a family of eight, five boys and three girls, of whom one brother and two sisters survive him. A younger brother died of consumption sixteen years ago, a fact which made him always a little nervous about his own health when troubled with coughs and colds.

His father, Dr. Samuel Smyth, went to live at a picturesque house called Stonepark, close to Mount Charles, from which he carried on the arduous duties of dispensary doctor to the district for a period of forty years. His

## WILLIAM SMYTH'S EARLY LIFE

work extended over an area some thirty miles in circumference, the inhabitants of which are for the most part small farmers described as "struggling for bare existence and unable to afford to pay for medical aid." To these the "Old Doctor," as he was familiarly called, was most assiduous in his attention. On many a dark and stormy night, when his increasing years might well have formed an excuse for staying at home, did he drive nine or ten miles over rough roads with a climb up a mountain side to finish up with, in order that he might reach the bedside of a patient. Not only did he bring what relief was possible to the sufferings of the sick, but none knew better than he how to cheer the grieving family, and many a time did he leave from his own pocket a substantial reminiscence of his visit. All honour to the doctors of Ireland ! It is a grand thing to be able to say that such men as Dr. Samuel Smyth are not isolated cases, but that in many a wild and poverty-stricken district throughout that land devoted doctors are to be found labouring by day and by night, year in year out, for a mere pittance.

Such was the example which Willie Smyth

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

(as he was generally called) had before him in his boyhood's home, and well did he follow it, as will be seen.

Very early in life he gave evidence of the grim determination with which he carried through whatever he had set his mind to do. There is a little story told of his boyhood which, though not a great matter, yet, like the straw which shows which way the wind is blowing, pointed to the resolute character which was to mark the man. Ever keen on games, he started a football club at Mount Charles, and soon had all the other lads of the neighbourhood as enthusiastic as himself. One day there was to be a match which they were all set upon winning. Several members of Willie Smyth's side were changing their clothes at his father's house preparatory to the game, and he was running up and down the stairs attending to their wants, when he slipped and sprained his ankle rather badly. For the most useful player on his side, his misfortune spread consternation among his companions. Seeing how disheartened they were, he made up his mind to play the match at whatever cost of pain to himself. Saying not a word to his family of

## WILLIAM SMYTH'S EARLY LIFE

what had happened, he carried out his intention, never giving in until the game was over. Then he collapsed, and was laid up for a considerable time.

On another occasion, when younger still, he was staying with his brothers and sisters at Coolmore, on the sea coast. There was in the same house a little girl just his own age, called Jessie Maria. One day the children were all down playing on the shore, which at that place is rocky and not over safe for small people. While scrambling about on some projecting ledges of rocks the tide suddenly came in, and they were cut off. All except Jessie Maria made a dash for it, and reached a place of safety. This child lost heart and remained trembling on the rock, the water every moment increasing in depth between her and the shore. Willie Smyth had his boots and stockings off in a moment, and waded out to her. She was paralysed by fright and refused to move. At last he persuaded her to get on his back, and, though she was almost as big and heavy as himself, he staggered with her to the shore. His feet and legs were torn and bleeding with the sharp rocks over which he had to pass, but it is

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characteristic of him that he told no one at home about it, lest the girl should be scolded or, at all events, laughed at for her escapade.

Up to the age of ten his education was carried on by his father and mother, but from that time he was for three and a half years under the tutelage of Mr. Willis, of Mount Charles. This gentleman thus describes his pupil: "Although I may have had, perhaps, cleverer boys, yet, in my experience, none could surpass him in retaining what he once grasped, or in dogged application to his work. From me he went to the Royal School, Raphoe, where, under the guidance of Mr. Weir, he was prepared for Trinity College, Dublin. While at Raphoe he was generally looked upon as Mr. Weir's 'good boy,' as I have heard his school-fellows say. During his four years' stay there he contracted typhoid fever, and was brought home to be under the care of his old nurse, who is still alive, and who fancies that had she had the charge of him in his last illness he would never have succumbed."

It was during these schooldays that Willie Smyth first made acquaintance with Burtonport, the scene of his manhood's labours. He used

## RAPHOE

to stay with Mr. Hammond at Lackbeg House, and he and his cousin, Willie Hammond (who has since died), were much attached to one another, and spent as much time as possible in one another's company. Time never hung heavy on their hands. They were always busy sea-fishing, boating, riding, shooting, or salmon-fishing at Gweedore. In fact the days at Burtonport were simply enchanting to a boy like Willie Smyth. At that time a Mr. Keown was the general merchant, and next to the agent and the priests the principal inhabitant of the place. He had been originally brought from Belfast to Gweedore by Lord Hill to manage a business there, but afterwards moved to Burtonport. He was one of the most kindly and charitable of men. In those days the fishing, as a profitable undertaking, did not exist. The men went over (as many of them do still) to Scotland for the harvesting, and managed to bring back a few pounds, which was the main income for the year. All trade was carried on on the credit system, the debt at the store being supposed to be paid each year on the return of the men. As may be imagined, there were many cases where the merchant saw little hope of his



## A HERO OF DONEGAL

money. But of Mr. Keown it is still told that "he never refused a man for a bag of meal if he thought he were in need."

Probably Willie Smyth never knew this Mr. Keown, who died when the former was quite a small boy, but the latter left, amongst other children, a little daughter some four years younger than Willie, who was destined before so many years had passed to become the sharer in that life of self-denying labour which lay before him in Burtonport. It was a happy thing for him that his choice fell upon a member of a family whose bringing-up had accustomed them to the wide and loving charity which puts self-interest entirely on one side.

After leaving Raphoe he passed on to Trinity College, Dublin. He had been "a strong, healthy boy, good-looking, and with a very pleasing countenance." He now began to develop into the splendid man over 6 ft. 2 in. in height and broad in proportion, whose appearance will never be forgotten in the Rosses. "The finest specimen of a man ever I saw," said a native of Donegal. "As fine a man as you 'ld see coming into a fair," said another.



## TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

And there can be no doubt about his personality having been most striking. He had the straight nose, firm mouth, and well-developed chin that tell of a determined and purposeful character. A little later he grew a brown moustache which in some measure softened the lines of his mouth, but most people at first sight thought him a little severe looking. This impression was, however, dissipated at once when that sweet, sunny smile broke over his countenance—a smile so full of tenderness and sympathy that it greatly helped to endear him to all the people of his district, especially the women. His hair turned white when he was not more than twenty. It is said that his mother's did the same at an even earlier age. Then his figure was splendidly set up, the very model of an athlete's. In course of time he came to weigh fifteen stone, but there was never an ounce of superfluous flesh upon him. In manner he is described as possessing some of the northern abruptness, and, says a close friend, "he was without affectation of any kind." This was the sort of young man who entered upon his studies at Trinity College, and it is not surprising to learn that he delighted in any exercise of strength and was

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

good at all games. Football was perhaps his favourite amusement, but he was also in the habit of going to the Phoenix Park, where there was a wrestling ring, in order to try his skill against all comers. He was, besides, a first-rate boxer, an art which he acquired at Dublin. When, a few years afterwards, he was busy getting his house ready at Burtonport, it is told how the painter who was employed by him was also fond of the gloves, and how Dr. Smyth would take him from his work day after day for a half-hour's bout at boxing. He also, when at Trinity College, held the championship for the long jump.

Of his studies at college there is little to be recorded. He was diligent and never "ploughed" in any of his examinations. He took the degrees of Licentiate in Midwifery and Licentiate and Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, but was never specially distinguished in this way. But in another fashion he began, while yet at Dublin, to show the stuff of which he was made. He completed his course a year before the minimum age for granting diplomas, and was a very young man when he gave proof of his courageous and self-denying qualities.

## HIS EARLY COURAGE

He was still "walking the hospitals" when a virulent case of small-pox occurred of so bad a kind that the house-physician required some assistance to deal with it. Smyth at once volunteered and was accepted. The patient—a woman—seeing how young he was, begged the house-physician not to let him go near her. Needless to say Smyth persisted in the work he had undertaken, with the result that he caught the complaint. Mercifully it proved to be a light attack, and the experience in no way lessened his fearlessness of disease.

Having finished his hospital course, there was still a year before he could be fully qualified, and this time he spent at home helping his father, who was very busy, as much as he could. One day there came a "sick call" from a house three miles away. Dr. Samuel Smyth was much engaged and sent "Willie" to see what was the matter. It proved to be a bad case of diphtheria. Here again his pluck asserted itself. His father assured him that there was no necessity for him to visit the house again, and indeed begged him not to do so. But such an opportunity of gaining experience in the treatment of this deadly disease was not

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

to be missed, and he insisted upon accompanying the "old doctor" in every one of his visits.

After getting his diploma, William Smyth was appointed to the dispensary of Ardara, and found himself at the age of twenty-one with a district of his own to look after. During this time an accident occurred which nearly ended fatally, in which case this story of a noble life could never have been told. From boyhood he had been passionately fond of the sea, and as much at home in a boat as on dry land. Often he would purloin some food from the pantry and steal away to join the fishermen in their all-night fishing in Donegal Bay, returning next morning with a peace-offering of herring ! Where other men just setting up for themselves might have spent money on horse-flesh, it is not surprising to learn that he purchased a yawl, and in her made as many of his journeys as possible to see his sick folk. He was one day sailing her quite alone from Portnoo to Ardara, when the boat, caught in a sudden squall, capsized. His great physical strength and skill alone saved him. It was a far longer swim than most men

## HIS FIRST DISPENSARY AT ARDARA

could have accomplished, but he reached the shore in safety, and very probably learnt one more lesson to help to make him the perfect master of a sailing-boat that he afterwards became.

## CHAPTER III

### HIS ELECTION TO THE DISPENSARIES OF DUNGLOW AND BURTONPORT—ROSHINE LODGE—HIS MARRIAGE

IN the year 1882 one of the periodical outbreaks of typhus fever occurred on the islands, and to some extent also on the mainland, in the Burtonport district. It broke out as usual in the autumn. This suggests that it was brought over by the men returning from the harvesting in Scotland. There can be no doubt that this has sometimes been the source of the epidemic. The men, when over there, are lodged in wretched "bothies" of the most insanitary kind—or at least were so lodged twenty years ago. The result was that besides their earnings they sometimes brought back with them a far more unwelcome gift in the shape of the fever which they gave to wives and children. Once

## HIS ELECTION TO THE DISPENSARIES

the typhus was clearly traced to an importation from Glasgow of old clothes in the last stage of rags and filth, which were eagerly bought up by the people in their then poverty-stricken condition. But these have not been the only causes for the deadly visitations which have been the scourge of the district. Insanitary houses at home as well as in Scotland have had much to do with it, and a scarce and bad water supply has contributed its share. A Roman Catholic priest, who was devotedly ministering to the sick during the outbreak of 1882, thus describes a scene which he will never to his dying day forget : "I went into the house. There lay a splendid girl at the last gasp upon a handful of straw on the floor. In the bed was her mother, stricken with the same fever. In the other room was another of the family with outstretched hands groping delirious round and round the walls ; while in a corner the old father lay prostrate and dying." A more awful state of things it would be difficult to imagine. The people are so terrified of the fever that not one could be found to help. A man, bolder than the rest, would bring a little meal or other food and place it outside the house. What



## A HERO OF DONEGAL

nursing was done was confined to the priest and the doctor, who carried their lives in their hands in unremitting efforts to relieve the sufferers. At that time the doctor for the district was Dr. Spencer, of Roshine Lodge, Burtonport. He and the priest had to do everything, even to the putting of the dead into their coffins. How terrible this work must have been may be gathered from the fact that the bodies in almost all cases turned black very shortly after death.

On the Island of Innischoo there were several patients. It so happened that, to avoid crowding, a small tent had to be erected for the accommodation of a young man struck down by the disease. On one of his visits Dr. Spencer turned back the flap of this tent, and was met by such a volume of foul air that he felt sick and ill. He returned to the mainland, went home to Roshine Lodge, and in a short time died of the fever. So it was that in October 1882 a vacancy occurred in the dispensary district of Dunglow and Burtonport. It was one of the largest spheres of work in point of area in all that part of Ireland, stretching as it did from Owey Island on the north to beyond



## HIS ELECTION TO THE DISPENSARIES

Maghery Bay on the south. It was also one of the most difficult to work, for besides the wide stretch of mainland there were also eight or nine islands to visit, one of them, Arranmore, with a scattered population of some fifteen hundred. Most of these islands are flat and exceedingly barren, and it is a puzzle to know what inducement there could have been for people to settle upon them. The congested state of the whole district is the only possible explanation. One island, lying to the south-east of Arranmore, is so flat that a few years ago the sea washed entirely over it. Curiously enough there stands on this island a house with an upper storey. Hither all the people flocked and crowded together above-stairs till the waters subsided. Among the applicants for the post of dispensary doctor for this district was Dr. William Smyth, then in charge of the smaller post of Ardara. No doubt the recollection of happy days in the past at Burtonport had something to do with his wish to obtain the appointment. May it not be possible that the memory of a little girl friend whom he had known at the same place had also an influence in the same direction?

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

Anyhow, whatever the cause, his name was one of those submitted to the Board of Guardians, with whom the decision lay. There were several reasons which made his selection improbable. In the first place, there was his youth ; he was only twenty-two. In the second place, he was a strong Loyalist, and the district was "Nationalist" almost to a man. Thirdly, he was a Protestant, and, as has been said, the Roman Catholics were in an overwhelming majority. In his favour were the facts that he was to some extent known, and wherever known was already well liked ; that his father's reputation as a devoted servant of the people had long been established ; and that his own record as one specially endued with those qualities of strength and courage which are essential to any one filling that particular post had already been made. It was this last fact that ultimately secured his success. Supporters and opponents appeared to be evenly balanced at the meeting that day called to elect the new doctor. Then up got a Roman parish priest, and told the following story. In the course of the few months that William Smyth had been at Ardara a sudden summons came to an urgent case of

## HIS ELECTION TO THE DISPENSARIES

illness. The house where the patient lay was at that time of the tide cut off by a long arm of the sea, half a mile wide. He did not hesitate for a moment, but, putting his horse at it, swam him across, and was quickly at the bedside of the sufferer. "What did you run such a risk for?" he was asked. "The horse might possibly have been drowned," he said, "but I should have got across myself." No doubt to a man of his physical powers the feat was not dangerous, but it was proof positive of his pluck and determination. The story had its effect: the votes were counted, and his election was secured by a majority of one.

Thus it was that when not much more than a lad—no older at all events than a large number of undergraduates at Oxford or Cambridge—he found himself in charge of this great district, the man to whom all looked in times of danger, and upon whose skill and devotion hung, under Providence, the issues of life and death. To meet this demand he brought the vigour of youth, the courage and strength which has been described, an abandonment of self rarely found in one so young, and a resolve to do whatever lay ready to his hand

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

with all his might. This last quality stood him in good stead. Many have said that with his application, and above all with his "presence" and manner, he might have ensured for himself a far better position in London or Dublin in what would be called a more important sphere of work. But the care of these people in the Rosses lay ready to his hand. He must have known that he was specially qualified by his powers of endurance and by his knowledge of the sea for such a post. To him it seemed as important to relieve the sufferings of poor folk on wind-blown islands as to hurry from consultation to consultation in the sick rooms of the rich.

A lady who was inspecting the district in the interests of sick-nursing was one day being driven by Dr. Smyth to visit a distant case. Seeing how eagerly he questioned her as to her experiences, and the latest developments in surgical and medical work which she had met with during her training in the Royal Infirmary at Edinburgh, she asked him how it came to pass that he could be content to live and work in such an out-of-the-way corner of the world, where it could be literally said that "there





Roshine Lodge

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## ROSHINE LODGE

were none to praise and very few to love," where all was such up-hill work, and where he had nothing but one long weary fight against ignorance and prejudice. He was silent for a moment, looking out across the low sandy hillocks to the grey waters beyond studded thick with rocky, desolate islands. Then he said slowly, "I suppose wherever a man finds work at hand to be done, there he had better stay and do it as well as he is able. Strange as it may seem, I love the place ; my wife belongs to these parts ; my home is here ; I have my boat and—after all, people's lives are as dear to them here as they are anywhere else, so I am content to live on as you see !" The people of his district have had cause to thank God who gave them a man with such a heart and mind to live and labour among them for nineteen years.

But to return to the time when he was first appointed. Roshine Lodge, which had always been the residence of the medical officer, is a capital house—far the best indeed in the whole district—standing on an eminence on the right-hand of the road about half a mile before one reaches the harbour of Burtonport. It is a well-built



## A HERO OF DONEGAL

stone house with two wings, one of which is used as the dispensary. It is also conspicuous as being partially surrounded by trees—the only specimens in the neighbourhood. They are not indeed of any great size, and might fairly be classed in some parts as underwood, but amongst them are a few ashes of fair growth which are objects of considerable pride to the inhabitants. The house is approached on the Burtonport side through white gates which open into a wide gravel drive. This is bordered by the low trees above mentioned, and has some extent of pretty broken ground on either side. There is another approach to the house from some distance further along the road by a pretty footpath beneath an avenue leading straight up to the front door. There is, further, a farm of seventeen acres attached to the house, a domain considered of great extent in that land of tiny holdings.

The porch in front of the house is substantial and square with a door on either side, an excellent plan in a country of gales which often assume the proportion of a hurricane. Situated on a hill of its own the views from the house are superb. Just over the road, running below,



## ROSHINE LODGE

there lies the little Lough Leckenagh, which in turn is separated by a small bit of rough ground from the sea itself. Indeed, were it not for the golden reeds which fringe its shore, it would be hard to determine whether the lakelet were salt water or fresh. Looking away over the rocky edge of the coast, the eye rests on the grey flat Island of Innishcree, and travels on to the gleaming waters of Gweebarra Bay. A little to the left is the hilly district behind Maghery, scarcely to be called mountainous, for its highest peak, Croaghegely, only reaches 800 ft. Turning again a fraction to the left, it is possible to trace the little estuary running four miles up to Dunglow, while in the distance are the hills of Crovehy (1000 ft.), Crocknahallin (1300 ft.), and Crocknasharragh (1650 ft.). But there is another view from Roshine Lodge even more beautiful than this. If, when entering by the white gates nearest to Burtonport, you turn sharp to the left and clamber up a little knoll of rock and grass, you come out upon a small plateau, a few yards square, which overlooks the channels between the mainland and the islands with Arranmore itself as a background. No matter when it is seen this view is always

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

glorious. But it is best of all, perhaps, when the gorse bushes in the foreground are in blossom, when the sun is sparkling on the ocean, and when the hills of Arranmore form a purple background to the golden flowers and the silver sea. This was Dr. Smyth's favourite view. From here he could see all the eight islands where so many of his interests lay. From here, above all, he could gaze on Arranmore—"his life-work," as it was sometimes called—Arranmore which lay so near to his heart, and for which at last he died.

On this little plateau he had erected a hut, the windows of which commanded this special view, and here he would come, when opportunity occurred, to read and think and gaze upon it all.

This little hut had been a present to him. It has been mentioned that a new coastguard station has been built at Burtonport. This hut was the shelter of the clerk of the works during the erection of the buildings, and on his departure he gave it to Dr. Smyth, a little instance of the affection with which the latter inspired every one with whom he had to do.

But this talk about Roshine Lodge has carried us on too far ahead. When the house first came,



Hut in the Grounds of Roslindale Lodge



## HIS MARRIAGE

into his possession there was a good deal that had to be done to it. Dr. Spencer had recently died there of typhus, and there was disinfecting to be seen to, as well as papering, painting, and the thousand and one little things that are necessary to put a house into fit condition for new tenants.

And new "tenants" it was to be, for Dr. William Smyth was not to be overpowered by the loneliness of his big new house, neither was he to fight his battle against the sickness and destitution of his district single-handed.

The little girl whom he had known in days gone by was now Miss E. McKeown, and nearly eighteen years old. There was nothing for which to wait. She consented to a speedy marriage, and in April 1883 the wedding took place in the parish church of Donegal.

## CHAPTER IV

FORMER CONDITION OF THE DISTRICT—  
FATHER BERNARD WALKER—MR. HAM-  
MOND—LOVE FOR ANIMALS

IT will have been gathered from what has been already said that the state of things in the Burtonport district was very different when Dr. Smyth took up his work from what it is to-day. It was some years before the Congested Districts Board made proper roads, and the difficulty of getting from place to place across wide tracts of country broken up by loughs and streams, and consisting of patches of boulder-strewn moorland, interspersed with bog, was immeasurably greater. And this was at a time when he had the whole of the Dunglow and Burtonport area with its twelve thousand inhabitants in his charge.

## FATHER BERNARD WALKER

“When he came here, I’m not able to tell you the misery and poverty of the country !” said an old man the other day. It was true enough. The memory of those bitter days is still fresh in the minds of the people, though now the keenest stress is past.

When Dr. Smyth came first to Burtonport to live, Mr. Hammond was agent to the Marquis Conyngham, and Father Bernard Walker was parish priest. The latter has been succeeded in his office some six years ago by his brother, Monsignor Walker, but his name is still a household word. “He made out that we wouldn’t do at all without the fishing,” said the above-mentioned old inhabitant, and he seems to have made the first move to set the industry on foot. He was one of those big-hearted, fearless, practical men who are found in the ranks of the priesthood, and he was loved and respected accordingly. Those were troublous times, and many were the assemblages of men already scheming to get rid of the landlords and, if possible, of the hated Saxon rule. On these occasions Father Bernard would generally be present and keep control of the gathering with a firm hand. “Ach!” said one who was

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often present, "it was Father Bernard Walker who had the big stick with him at the meetings ! If one of the boys would be using a wrong word, the Father would begin looking round for the stick, and indeed the boy would soon fly !" "Boy " is used commonly for " man " in most parts of Ireland, and the visitor need not be alarmed if he is told that there will be a "boy " to drive the ramshackle car, or a "boy " to put him across an awkward bit of rough sea in a boat.

Well, in the face of so much poverty and distress, differences of creed and of politics were laid aside, and these three men, Father Walker, Mr. Hammond, and Dr. Smyth, worked heart and soul together to put things on a more satisfactory footing. Nets were got and men were obtained to show the natives how to use them and how to repair them. It was uphill work at first. The people were so indifferent and so careless. Nets would be lost or destroyed in the most unnecessary way ; and many a time has Dr. Smyth gone down to the pier and told the men lounging there of the signs of herring which he has just observed, and has had to use all his powers of persuasion to get them to put



## FATHER BERNARD WALKER

out and gather in the rich harvest awaiting them. The next step was to arrange for the disposal of the fish when brought to shore. Places were provided for the reception of the herrings, and for the curing and salting, and for some years past the men have merely had to bring them to the pier and to receive ready money for them as soon as they are turned out of their boats. At the present day one of these small open fishing boats—not to be compared to the larger craft of Yarmouth or Penzance—will bring in for one night's fishing thirty or forty baskets of herring, each worth from five shillings upwards when sold by auction on the pier. And this is the direct result of the combined action of these three men, carried on afterwards by the efforts of the Congested Districts Board.

Besides the absence of any profitable industry there were two other causes which helped to impoverish the district. Since the time when, as the people there put it, they were driven by Cromwell from the fatter lands of the country to crowd together on these barren hillsides, there had always been extreme difficulty in getting any of the necessities of life imported.

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They had had to live mainly upon their own resources, and these were soon exhausted. About the time of which we are speaking, *i.e.*, nearly twenty years ago, Mr. Hammond found a charge of half a crown per hundredweight on everything carried by sea from Londonderry. He set to work to alter this prohibitive price, and obtained a sailing-ship to bring goods for sixpence—just one-fifth of the old charge. Afterwards came steamboats which, though taking twelve hours for the trip, enabled some kinds of merchandise to be received at a less cost still. Here was an improvement indeed! No wonder the people still honour his name, for not only was he mainly influential in obtaining these benefits for them, but they say: “He never drowned a fire: he never dispossessed a man in all his time! Isn’t that a great blessing for him?” A wonderful testimonial truly for an agent to receive in a congested district!

In all such good work Dr. Smyth and Father Bernard Walker heartily joined. There was just one other practice to which they managed to put an end. It had been the custom when rents were overdue for the bailiffs to go out on

## MR. HAMMOND

some given day and drive in every four-footed beast to be sold to pay the money owing. Then an extraordinary proceeding was witnessed. These bailiffs would call out, "Give a shilling per beast, and we will let them go for a month." Few of these poor farmers could get on without the one or two head of cattle they possessed. The shillings would be paid, and went simply into the bailiffs' pockets, not one farthing going towards the debt to the landlord. By their influence and exertions these three good men put a stop to this wretched system of extortion, and added yet one more claim to be considered the benefactors of the district.

No doubt it was partly owing to the fact that the people could see how earnestly Dr. Smyth tried in every way to help them, as well as partly to his attractive personality, that his being a Protestant and a loyalist were no stumbling-block in the way of his gaining their affections. He never argued with them, or, indeed, spoke to them concerning their faith. But on political matters he talked freely, and it is said that he was the only man who could go down to the pier or the store and discuss politics from a loyalist

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

point of view with the groups of men always to be found there, without raising a quarrel or provoking a bitter word.

And yet he did not hide his loyalty under a bushel. In 1885, 6, and 7 the land trouble in Gweedore culminated in the Plan of Campaign, and was largely reflected in the district of Dunglow and Burtonport. All loyalists and persons supposed to sympathise with the landlords were, to say the least of it, unpopular. The agent at Gweedore obtained ejectment decrees against a large number of tenants who had adopted the Plan of Campaign under the dictatorship of the Rev. James McFadden, Parish Priest of Gweedore—a very different stamp of man to Father Bernard Walker. Large numbers of police were assembled to protect the Sheriff in his unpleasant duty of carrying out evictions. The car-owners of Dunglow refused, with one exception, to drive the police. The exception was a respectable shopkeeper, by name Maurice Boyle. From the first his fate was certain. He was the object of a rigid boycott. No one would go near him. Any one helping him in any way would have to share his fate. His wife was dying. He could scarcely obtain the

## THE DOCTOR A LOYALIST

necessaries of life. He had to send his horses eighteen miles away to get them shod. No one would sell him a single truss of hay to feed the poor brutes. But he had one friend who helped him through this terrible time. Dr. Smyth, well knowing the risk he ran of losing his popularity in the district, visited his wife constantly, bringing over many things for her comfort which no one else would supply. Not content with this, though certain of incurring the hostility of the local leaders, and not without some fear that he would himself be boycotted, he sent over a load of hay that Maurice Boyle's horses at least should not suffer.

The inspector of police at Dunglow at that time was Mr. Stevenson, a man of Dr. Smyth's own age, a sportsman and a close friend. The doctor received a warning that he must not keep the company of the district inspector! Needless to say, he took no notice of this, but continued to visit Mr. Stevenson as usual, and entertained him frequently at Roshine Lodge.

Some emphasis has been laid upon these facts because they not only afford fresh evidence of

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William Smyth's courage and determination, but they show still more plainly how great must have been his personal loveliness and how strong his hold upon the district. Scarcely any other man living could have acted as he did in the very teeth of the strongest prejudices of the people, and in times of so much agitation and bitterness of feeling, and yet have ultimately lost no whit of his position as their greatest friend and benefactor.

All that has happened since those days has only increased this feeling. Speak to any man, woman, or child to-day—stop yonder peasant bowed beneath his load of peat, and what will he say? “Ach! it is I would bring him back to life!” “It was he took the interest in the poor people!” “The place is not the same at all, at all,” and so on, giving expression in their picturesque and heartfelt way to the greatness of their loss.

It has already been seen how earnestly he worked for the temporal prosperity of his neighbours. The greater work which he did among the sick must be left to a future chapter. There is one trait in his character which has not yet been mentioned, and which

## LOVE FOR ANIMALS

went far to win the people to him, and that was his power of adapting himself to the needs and understanding of the special person to whom he might be speaking. Major Gosselin, who has a fishing lodge close to Burtonport, and who knew him well, in the course of a most interesting letter about Dr. Smyth, thus describes this quality. He says :

“I think one of the most distinguishing features in Smyth’s character was his sympathy—or perhaps that is not the proper word to use. If he was talking to a poor and ignorant peasant woman he entered into her miseries and wants as completely as if he expected a five-pound note for a fee, and if I asked him about one of my dogs, of which I have many, he would go as deeply into it as if his reputation depended upon it. He doctored all the cows, or rather gave the people his advice, *free gratis*.”

This reference to animals makes this a fitting opportunity to tell of his fondness for them all. He had, of course, a great deal of driving work, and made a personal friend of his pony for the time being. He had one which did all his mainland journeys for ten years, and became



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so confidential that he could leave it standing quietly beside the road, or more probably the rough cart track, while he went considerable distances away to visit patients. This pony would remain perfectly quiet until it heard his step, when it would begin to fidget, and the moment his foot was on the step of the car away it would go at a fast trot. Once this habit proved unfortunate, for Dr. Smyth missed his footing, and the pony went off home alone, turning in safely to his stable-yard after a journey of several miles. Another little story may be told of his ponies. He was not always so fortunate in the character of his animals. He had one day driven off northwards towards Cruit Island, where the way has often to be found through sand and water and marshy places. He arrived all right and left pony and car on the shore while he went to visit a sick woman. What happened during his absence can never be known, but on his return he found the car broken to matchwood and the pony boldly swimming for New York ! Fortunately it thought better of it and returned, but Dr. Smyth found himself in an awkward predicament so far from home. His horses



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always knew and obeyed his voice. He delighted in taming vicious or badly broken animals until they yielded to his lightest word. And this was done entirely by the same method as that which attracted human beings to him—namely, the exercise of determination and extreme kindness. An instance of this power occurred on one occasion when he was visiting a house in a mountainous district, and put his horse up in an outhouse, from which, being a restless and difficult animal, it broke loose and ran wild upon the hillside. It was seen by several men in the neighbourhood, who did all they knew to catch it, but in vain. Just then out came the Doctor from the patient's house, and, seeing what had happened, called loudly to the horse. Immediately it stopped its gallop, gave itself an impatient shake, and then came meekly enough and allowed him to catch it. This was attributed by the people to what they call "grammery"—something perhaps akin to charm or mesmerism.

In dogs, too, he took a great delight. Two of these pets of his are well remembered. One was a little shaggy terrier, so devoted to him that it *would* accompany him in his longest

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tramps, even in the worst of weathers. Even snow would not keep him at home, and when his long hair got matted and heavy with the wet and clinging stuff, Dr. Smyth would take him in his arms and carry him long distances home. The other dog was his red Irish setter, which not only went with him on his snipe and duck-shooting expeditions, but frequently occupied the seat on the other side of the car when the doctor drove about the country. "I have seen," says a friend, "this dog endeavour to push away a person to whom Dr. Smyth had given a seat, as if his rights were invaded."

Dr. James Little, of Dublin, has something to say on this same subject. He writes :

"It so happened that I rented a place some twenty miles from Burtonport, and being in want of sporting dogs for the shooting, I wrote to Dr. Smyth, and he lent me two, and came over himself for a day's shooting. . . . He knew all about animals. One of our horses had met with an accident, and a deep abscess had formed on its back. Dr. Smyth found out what was wrong, and let out the matter. A little blue bird we had had swallowed a poi-

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sonous caterpillar, and was apparently dying. He showed us what to do for it."

It seems that no creature, whether brute or human, could fail to draw out the sympathy of which the man's big heart was full.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DOCTOR'S WORK ON THE MAINLAND

IT has been already told how great were William Smyth's physical strength and powers of endurance. It is interesting, but scarcely necessary, to note that he was exceedingly temperate. He never smoked, but during the latter years of his life he would take a very occasional glass of whisky. "It was more," says one who knew him intimately, "that he *could* take it than that he wished to." In boyhood's days he was a complete teetotaler. One of his sisters gives an interesting account of this. She writes: "When we were small children we 'signed the pledge,' and Willie never smoked. We thought smoking very nasty. When he was a boy we started a Temperance Society . . . . One night Willie was at Drumconnon when the people were crowding home from market. The night was

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very dark and a horse and cart ran away. Many people were very badly hurt. Two old women and a man were so much injured that Willie got them into a house and beds were made up for them on the floor in the kitchen. One of the women had her throat cut by the shaft which just caught her in the neck. She died the next day. The other old woman was bad enough too, but she was able to speak, and kept saying all the time, 'Ah! it was the whisky done it!' Ever after, when any catastrophe happened, Willie would say, 'It was the whisky done it!' and we generally could trace it to this. Later on, when he had to speak at a temperance meeting, I remember his saying, 'I advise you to drink like beasts—for beasts only drink when they are thirsty, and then only water.'” No doubt this temperate habit was of the utmost service to him in preserving his constitution, but it must have been a difficult one to maintain in a country where the whisky bottle used to appear on every possible occasion. Even children were in those days offered “the craythur,” for once when he and his brothers and sisters were quite young they took shelter in a house where the woman poured out

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for each of them a bumper of the spirit, and was so offended at their refusal to drink it that she poured some of it over one of the little girls!

But things are better now, and Dr. Smyth lived to rejoice in a decided diminution in the drinking habits of the people. Even "wakes" are known no longer in the sense in which they existed a few years ago. Within Dr. Smyth's recollection the scenes at these "festivities" were awful. A story is told of a "wake" held upon an old woman who lived in a little house at the end of the Warren near to the Smyths' old house at Mount Charles. For years this poor old lady, Bridget O'Brenan, had been "bent in her two doubles." After her death heavy stones were laid upon her to straighten her out for her coffin, and in this condition she was "waked." One of those present (who had had his full share of whisky) waved his glass towards the corpse shouting, "Here's a health to you, Bridget O'Brenan!" At that moment up jumped Bridget, and in less time than it takes to tell the house was empty of all but her! The fact is that the stones had gradually slipped off the body, and poor old Bridget crumpled up

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again. Those who were "waking" her quite  
believed that she had come back to life.

By the time that William Smyth had lived his  
forty years such scenes became an impossibility,  
and, indeed, to most people they read like legends  
of the far-off past.

It is time to describe so far as possible what  
were the special difficulties and most arduous  
parts of the work which fell to Dr. Smyth's  
lot, and which rendered his temperate life and  
physical endurance of such value. It will be as  
well to attempt to follow him in one of those  
long journeys over the mainland which were  
frequent during the time he held the combined  
dispensaries of Dunglow and Burtonport.

It should be stated that all distances in this  
book are reckoned by Irish miles. The Irish  
mile is 2224 yards, or more than a mile and a  
quarter as we reckon distance in England. This  
is apt to be a snare to the tourist, and to cause  
him many disappointments until he has got  
used to it. For instance, he will inquire how  
far it is to some place which he understands is  
quite close by. "Oh! it'll be a mile and a  
but," is very probably the answer. He will find  
the mile an uncommonly long one, and will be

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lucky if the "but" does not turn out to be longer still !

But to return to Dr. Smyth. A "boy" has come hurrying over from a little house up in the mountains beyond Maghery. Nine miles has he covered, half walking and half running, on an empty stomach. The wife is near her time, and in the excitement and anxiety of the moment he has not thought of any breakfast. Exhausted but eager he reaches the door of Roshine Lodge. Quick eyes have already seen him coming, and the door is opened almost as soon as he knocks. He is bidden to come in, and while he tells his story a bowl of soup is brought him and he is comforted with the assurance that the doctor is only down in Burtonport and shall be fetched immediately. Almost before he has finished his meal, and certainly before he is thoroughly rested, there is the doctor himself greeting him with a hearty smile and telling him to come along. The doctor's pony has done a long journey in the night, so the messenger who fetched the doctor has gone on to John Boyle's to get him to drive them over in his car. Hurrying down the straight footpath between the trees in front of the house



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they reach the road, and, turning sharp to the left, a couple of minutes brings them to Boyle's just as the horse is being put into the car. Before another two minutes are passed they are off, Boyle driving, the doctor on one side of the car and the anxious husband on the other, the latter's thoughts being divided between natural fears as to how things are going at home and a grateful sense of the difference between the good days since Dr. Smyth came and the times before them when, if he came for the doctor, he would have to go to Burtonport and get a mouthful to eat and a glass of whisky at the store instead of being fed and rested at Roshine Lodge.

Meantime the car has climbed the rising ground where now stands the new Roman Catholic Chapel and priest's house, and turning off to the right takes the rough track called the "shore road" in the direction of Dunglow, for the new and better road has not yet been constructed by the Congested Districts Board. The doctor is all alive as they go along, noticing where a wild duck has brought out her brood in one of the creeks of Lough Meela along the southern shore of which the road passes close, or where, just

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beyond the point of the bed of reeds, a good trout is rising steadily. He is kept busy, too, saluting the inhabitants of the many little homesteads on which they come at every bend, for already, though he has not been so very long among them, he knows every man, woman, and certainly every child by name, and has a smile, a word, or maybe only a distant wave of the hand for them all. Presently they come down to the very edge of the little estuary which stretches up to Dunglow, and the interest is changed to the state of the tide, the red and gold and brown seaweed, the ripple on the blue water, and the various sorts of gulls and curlew and divers which haunt that shallow arm of the sea.

Just before entering the little town they pass the Episcopal Church, lying below them on the very verge of the water, and then climbing half way up the street they turn off to the right and catch sight of the small stone landing-place where at certain tides boats of shallow draught can come alongside and load their freights. Four miles had been traversed before reaching Dunglow, and now on they go for another five, past Maghery Lough, past

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the Rectory—an inconveniently long distance from the town, but telling of a bygone age when the church and the larger portion of the inhabitants were to be found at Maghery—round by the shore of Maghery Bay, until at last the doctor and his guide have to leave the car and make the best of their way up the mountain-side on foot. At last the long low hut is reached, and the husband goes in hurriedly ahead, anxious to know if they are in time. He pushes on one side a calf which has established itself just inside the doorway, blocking the only light the living-room obtains. The doctor follows ; at first he can see nothing, but he is used to this, for it is the usual condition of houses of this class. He strikes a match and gets a look at his patient, and then is busy for long enough with a difficult and dangerous confinement.

Meantime Boyle and his car have waited hour after hour below, and the poor man, hurried away before he had time to put a mouthful of meat in his pocket, envies the pony who gets a crop at the bits of grass between the boulders and stones. At last to his joy he sees the doctor coming. “ Eh ! but

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it's I that am glad to see you, doctor," he says. "But I haven't finished, Johnny," is the answer. "Jump up, and let us get back to Dunglow for a bit of food, for you must be as hungry as I am." Off they go for the five-mile drive to Dunglow, but just as they reach the place, "It'll be as well to go on home," says the doctor; "we shall be there while they're getting anything ready for us here." So the whole nine miles are traversed; the doctor jumps down at Boyle's door, runs up home for a snack, and before the pony has finished his feed is back again and ready to start once more on the long and weary way to the poor woman's bedside. Thus those nine miles were travelled four times that day—nine Irish miles, too—making a total according to English reckoning of about six-and-forty miles to see that one poor soul and help her through her trouble. It should be stated that no particularly unusual or sensational day's work has been selected, and that the event has been described exactly as it occurred in all main particulars.

It is probable that just the same kind of journey was frequently taken by Dr. Smyth at night, for it was a usual occurrence for him to

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be called away long distances when he had but just got to sleep after a hard day's work. He never allowed that it mattered at all to him, and he never kept any one waiting five minutes before he was dressed and down and ready to start away. A doctor in an ordinary English practice can scarcely imagine the trials met with by day and by night in an out-of-the-way dispensary district in Ireland. It is no uncommon thing to hear an English doctor complain of the "stiffness" of a cottage bedroom and the difficulty in getting the window opened often enough. What would he say to having to attend a fever case, or a wound, or a confinement in a house which for all practical purposes contained only one room and had no window at all? How would he put up with the mixture of closeness and draught from the door, with the smells which had accumulated for generations and which arose from human beings, cows, ponies, poultry, peat smoke, tobacco, old rags, and the foul water standing in the hollows of a mud floor? Yet this sort of thing was an everyday experience of Dr. Smyth. An old inhabitant in talking of his powers of endurance said: "He would sit half the night in a house a black

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would hardly live in," and added, in reference to the scanty precautions he took, "and he got a great dale of long fasts."

When Dr. Smyth went to visit a house after dark a picturesque method of lighting him on his way was very common. Most of the houses lie a little off the roads, a path leading the two or three hundred yards over the moorland to the door. These paths are difficult to trace in the dark, and they sometimes pass by dangerous spots, such as the edge of a pit in the bog where peats have been dug out. When the doctor was ready to leave, the "boy" would seize an immense piece of glowing turf from the hearth and, holding it in front of him in the tongs, would precede the doctor all the way to where his pony and car were waiting. When there is any breeze the sparks from these improvised torches blow wildly away into the darkness, and on more than one occasion Dr. Smyth narrowly escaped an accident from his pony taking fright at the illumination.

Besides his numerous journeys to see patients there were also the various dispensaries to be attended at stated times. There was a weekly attendance at Burtonport and another at Dun-

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glow. There was a dispensary seven miles away in the direction of Gweedore, at which he was due each Saturday, and there was another on the Island of Arranmore. To this last he would have to cross in his boat whatever the weather, and there is no wonder that after a time he found it beyond his power to keep the combined districts of Burtonport and Dunglow, and prevailed on the authorities to separate the latter and appoint another doctor to it. Some words of his friend Mr. Stevenson's may well close this chapter. He writes: "Dr. Smyth was devoted to his duties. He was always ready to answer a call no matter how far the distance or how bad the day or night. Only one who knows the country of the Rosses could appreciate the hardships of a doctor's life there. Even *his* great strength and energy gave way at times, and he would have to take to his bed."



## CHAPTER VI

### HIS SKILL AS A DOCTOR—HIS LOVE OF BOATING

IT is difficult for a mere layman to attempt to give any description of Dr. Smyth's work and success in his profession. Still, some things may be said, and some may be quoted from those who were privileged to help him. Quite enough has already been written to show his self-sacrificing readiness to devote himself instantly to the care of any who needed him. The thoroughness with which he gave himself, his means, and his time to others may be illustrated by two cases which are described by Miss Glynn, who was for some time stationed at Burtonport as one of the Queen's Jubilee nurses. "I knew Dr. Smyth," says this lady, "to bring patients from a distant part of the district to lodge close to his house, where he could see them daily. One of these was a young woman (an orphan) for whom we



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had great difficulty in obtaining lodgings. She had come back from service, and only received half a crown a week from the union. Finally, a room was got for a shilling a week. Bed-clothes were brought from Roshine Lodge, and her food came every day from the same place. Dr. Smyth attended her continually until she could again go to a place. Had it not been for the kindness she received from Dr. and Mrs. Smyth she must have died a dreadful death.” The other case mentioned is that of a man called Alexander McCallum. He was a poor sailor from Scotland, who got his leg broken in a drunken riot in Burtonport. He had no bed but his little cramped berth on board his boat—an impossible place in which to nurse a fracture of the kind. Dr. Smyth had him taken to an empty coastguard house first of all, but, on those quarters being shortly required, he removed him to Roshine Lodge. There he got a man to sleep in the same room with him, supplied him with food from his own table, nursed him till he was well, and then gave him money to take him back to his home in Scotland. These and many similar actions he did in the simplest possible way, as if they were the natural and usual thing

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for a man to do. Mrs. Stoyte, who was formerly superintendent of the Queen Victoria Institute in Dublin, bears witness to the impression made by Dr. Smyth upon such nurses as from time to time worked under him. She says: "It has been said that 'no man is a hero to his valet,' and it has certainly not often been my experience to find an Irish dispensary doctor who became a hero to his district nurse. But such Dr. Smyth proved to be, and that in more than one instance. It was from these nurses that I heard from time to time tale after tale of his untiring and conscientious work among the sick poor."

It is interesting to notice here that for some years there was a small hospital on the island of Enniscoo under the charge of one of these Jubilee nurses. It was a singularly inconvenient place, for it obliged the doctor to cross in a boat at every visit and in all weathers. Dr. Smyth often had to take out his boat and row over to the island on his return from a hard day's work. Then, again, it was found quite impossible for the nurse to carry on the work there in the way in which the London Council of the Queen's Institute expected it to be done. The result

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was that about the year 1895 the hospital was given up and the nurse was established on the mainland at Burtonport, where she remained until the summer of 1901, when she removed to Dunglow. Naturally, these nurses saw more of Dr. Smyth's work and understood it more thoroughly than most people, and it is beautiful to read such a description (written by one of them) as the following: "All his work he did thoroughly. He was never satisfied with anything but the best. He had most capable hands, and the gentlest touch, with ever a bright smile and a cheery word. I never saw a doctor so sensitive about giving pain to children. I remember his saying that he couldn't bear to hurt the poor little thing, when he was about to operate on a hare-lip. Sometimes he used to sit a little while talking to an old couple by their fire, and listening to the news about their children in America, and they were always so proud and pleased when he could stay. Many is the prayer both in Irish and English I have heard said for him in the houses as he was passing by."

It has been said by some that "the doctor" was more fond of surgical than medical cases. How far that was true cannot be known, but he

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was most successful with the knife, and had a great reputation for his skill. It was during his last visit to his old home at Mount Charles that one of the navvies at work on the Donegal light railway met with an accident which necessitated the amputation of an arm. Nothing would suit him but that "the young doctor" should do the job. In fact, he flatly refused to let any one else touch it. So Dr. Smyth was sent for, and the operation was successfully accomplished. Mr. Hammond tells the following story, bearing out the description of the doctor's skill:

"About fourteen years ago, when only a very young medical officer, he asked me to go with him to Arranmore to see a poor man who was, he feared, going to die. This man had a long time before hurt one of his feet seriously—I think in Scotland—and, as no proper attention was paid to it, it mortified, and the disease gradually made its way up the leg. He refused to go to hospital, and up to that time declined to undergo an operation. The doctor told him that he was willing to operate, and that in his opinion he could not live in his present state for more than a fortnight, but that, if he would have his leg off, there was a chance of his

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recovery. There was no flesh whatever on the leg from about six or eight inches below the knee, simply the bare bone, and the poor man himself, thin and pale, looked the picture of death. I thought it a risky thing to perform such an operation in such an isolated place and in such a wretched house with no convenience whatever. But the doctor was nothing daunted. He made his preparations, got another doctor to help him, and took the leg off above the knee. He then made the poor man, who was really at death's door, as comfortable as possible, gave directions as to food and nourishment (the materials for which he had brought with him), and left for home. He was over early next day and found his patient extremely weak, nothing remaining on the stomach. A brief examination of the food sufficiently accounted for this, the preparation being most defective. Henceforth the patient's diet was prepared at Roshine Lodge and brought over daily, generally by Dr. Smyth himself. The poor man gradually recovered. I got a little money together among my friends and procured from London a mechanical leg which the doctor fitted on to the stump. I saw him afterwards

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hale and healthy digging in the fields, and I think he was able to go to Scotland for the harvest."

This incident illustrates the two great qualities which characterised Dr. Smyth's work—viz., his courage and his charity—in the widest sense of the word. It required no little pluck to undertake such an operation in the insanitary surroundings of an Irish cabin. When the elaborate preparations, the trained assistants, the antiseptic appliances, &c., all of which are thought essential for the simplest operation in one of our hospitals, are considered, it is impossible to withhold the greatest admiration from a man who dared to attempt and who brought to a successful issue a feat of the kind described in the dim light and doubtful atmosphere of one of the houses on Arranmore.

There was a great similarity between Dr. Smyth's attitude as a doctor and as a boatman. In both capacities he was pre-eminently skilful. In both he was wonderfully brave, but in neither would he take an unnecessary risk or one that he did not believe he had strength and skill to meet. "He never did anything in a boat for mere bravado," says a friend, and assuredly he

## HIS LOVE OF BOATING

was too tender-hearted to do so in a sick room. But in both it may fairly be said that he was at his best in circumstances that were pregnant with danger.

Something has already been said about his skill upon the water. His boats were so much used to take him from island to island in his visits to the sick that a few words more may well be said here. He possessed latterly two boats, one a little yacht, called the *Stella*, which he could handle admirably and which could easily sail away from any other boat in those parts, the other a small punt which he used for crossing the "roads" in calm weather. His acquaintance with the tides and currents, the shoals and submerged rocks was extraordinary. It was sometimes said in joke that when sailing over a rock he could tell "by the feel" which it was, though it lay some feet below the bottom of his boat. It was his habit of close observation and accurate noting of detail which stood him in such good stead and enabled him to determine at once what dangers beset him and what course to steer. It was just the same in his profession. He was the keenest observer and most accurate in his diagnoses. On one



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occasion a patient of his in Burtonport developed lung trouble which did not seem in all respects usual. Dr. Smyth noted every symptom and every detail with great care and drew his own conclusion. He recognised in the case a very rare lung disease commonly believed to be confined to manufacturing districts. Other doctors in the neighbourhood whom he consulted could not bring themselves to believe in the possibility of this disease appearing in Burtonport, but when it happened that Dr. James Little, the eminent Dublin physician, had an opportunity of inspecting the case, he at once confirmed the opinion which Dr. Smyth had formed.

But to return to his boats. One of the means by which he tried to improve the efficiency of the little fishing fleet which gradually began to arise at Arranmore and Burtonport was an annual regatta in the "roads." This became the great event of the year, but never was a boat found that could really make a race of it with his little *Stella* when her owner was in charge with his two boys to help. It will be seen later on how in his last hours his thoughts kept returning to his boat and to the excitement



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of the regatta, and it will also be seen how large a part his skill as a boatman played in the great act of devotion to Arranmore and its people which cost him his life.

## CHAPTER VII

HIS HOME LIFE—LOVE FOR CHILDREN—  
BROKEN HEALTH—VOYAGE TO BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

SIDE by side with the work which Dr. Smyth carried on for the benefit of the whole neighbourhood were the many joys and anxieties of his homelife. Not that the two things were kept altogether separate. Mrs. Smyth took the keenest interest in helping the poorer patients in all ways that lay in her power, and the people who came to the dispensary at Roshine Lodge, and those who arrived in haste to summon the doctor at other times, knew that they had as true a friend in her as in Dr. Smyth. But children began and continued to arrive with almost disconcerting rapidity. Not only so, but many of them were far from strong, and caused their parents much anxiety. Fourteen little ones were born in



Dr. and Mrs. Smyth and Family

(A. Orr, photo, Londonderry)



## HIS HOME LIFE

rather more than eighteen years, of whom eight only survive. Of the other six, four died in infancy, and two when scarcely five years old.

With such a large house to keep up as Roshine Lodge, and with the great expense entailed by so large a family, it might be thought that a considerable income would be necessary, and certainly that but little hospitality would be possible. No doubt a larger income would have been welcome, and it might have enabled Dr. Smyth to make provision against the chance of his untimely death, but it was never his. The payment for a dispensary doctor's services in that capacity is terribly small. In Dr. Smyth's case it did not latterly exceed £100 a year. The fees received from patients, other than dispensary cases, are large according to our English ideas, but when the distances are considered, and the expense of horses and boats, they do not seem excessive. There is one advantage which the Irish system has over ours in the fact that it is all ready money. There are no books to be kept or bills to be made out. The usual fee is ten shillings for one visit, and one pound for a confinement, the latter not including any visit beyond the actual attendance at the birth. It might

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be thought that with so large a district and with such good fees Dr. Smyth should have made a comfortable income. That his profits were not great is accounted for by the stories that are told of his open-handed generosity. The Rector of Dunglow, writing on this subject, says: "He was one of the most exemplary men, kind and generous almost to a fault. He was frequently known to carry food to his poorer patients, and fully twenty-five or thirty per cent. of his medical fees were never expected and certainly never paid. When offered fees, in many cases they were declined, in others half was returned to procure nourishment for the patient."

Monsignor Walker, the parish priest of Burtonport, fully bears this out. Nothing is commoner than for the people to carry complaints to the priest about the doctor, especially should the latter press for his fees. "Never," said the Monsignor, "have I heard one word about Dr. Smyth except of praise." Bearing in mind the religious and other differences, this is a remarkable testimony indeed.

Then, again, his generosity in other directions, notably towards church matters, of which mention is made elsewhere, must not be forgotten.

## HIS HOME LIFE

So that there need be no difficulty in understanding the fact that there was not a great deal of surplus income at Roshine.

But for all that the hospitality of the house knew no bounds. Every friend who writes or speaks of Dr. Smyth tells of the ready welcome he or she invariably experienced, while more than one describe the days they spent with the Smyths as some of the very happiest of their lives.

And no wonder. There was so much to attract in both the place and the people. It was such a pleasure to watch the doctor in his garden or among his bees. There is always a charm in seeing a big, strong man's pleasure in simple things. And he was never happier than when trying to encourage the flowers to grow in the little sheltered patch of garden he had made beneath the rock below the house, or in attending to his beehives which were set out behind the flowers. Or if it were spring-time he would point with delight to the golden daffodils shining everywhere about the grass, or to the masses of snowdrops, earlier still, beneath the trees on either side of the pathway to the house.

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Then his visitor must come and see his animals—his horse, his poultry, and especially his dogs—and witness the affectionate relations that existed between him and them.

But he was at his best among his children, and this was perhaps the greatest charm of all. Never was he so winning as when he threw aside all his work and anxieties and joined his boys, Willie and Hugh, in a game of cricket, with the little girls to help to field. During the last year or two of his life these two boys were great companions to him. They are fourteen and thirteen years old, and nearly of a size, and he taught them all the outdoor exercises in which he himself excelled. They can swim like otters; they are experienced boatmen, and were his companions in many a sail over rough and apparently dangerous seas. They tramped with him miles over the hills, thinking the toil nothing in his company, and well rewarded if they had a blue hare or two and a grouse to carry home. How his children loved him! If he were out in the evening the little ones would beg hard to sit up till he came in, and then often enough two of them would climb upon his knees and drop asleep almost as soon as they



## LOVE FOR CHILDREN

felt his arms around them. But his love went out to all children. He had two tiny nieces in Burtonport, who knew his footstep well, and would run and have him fast by the legs as soon as ever he came inside the door.

Children seemed to have just the same complete confidence in him that was felt by his poor patients, little more than children in their ignorance and simplicity themselves. When he entered a sick room he took command of everybody and everything, and there was at once a feeling of entire trust in him. The people would declare that the very sight of him coming in made them feel better. It was the combination of strength and sweetness, of determination and gentleness, which won them, just as it won all the children who crossed his path.

The fact is that, though some were jealous of him and many disliked his religious and political faith, it was more than the people could do to help loving the man himself, and the delight which their children took in him greatly helped towards this result. It must have been a large factor in producing that content with his life in that far-away spot of which mention has been made.

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

Picture a scene which must often have brought a feeling of gratitude and happiness to his heart. It is autumn, and the crops on the doctor's farm are ready to be gathered. Word has gone out that on such a day the work is to be done. The doctor himself comes out in the morning, and, behold ! a crowd of men and women are busy getting in his harvest. Will there not be a heavy bill to pay for so much labour? Not one penny ! There is not a soul there who would not be affronted were Dr. Smyth to offer to pay for the ready service. No matter that since the railway works have been in progress there are fewer people with time to spare, there was *always* time to give for the doctor's harvest. Meantime, Mrs. Smyth and her eldest daughter and her maids have been busy indoors. A long table is spread in the kitchen and an ample meal provided for all, with a bottle of ale or porter for any who wish. May it be many years before this spirit of gratitude and neighbourly feeling dies away. The railway will be sure to bring an influx of "trippers," and with their advent it may be feared that this generous pride, which now revolts at the idea of payment for willing help, may give place

## BROKEN HEALTH

to the outstretched palm with which all are familiar.

Just one other scene. The doctor is standing a little later in the year at his gate talking to some friends from England. Suddenly a group of men is seen coming along the road on their way home from the harvest in Scotland. "I wonder," said the doctor, "who they are and what they are bringing me. I generally find that they bring me something back with them with which I have to battle during the winter!" So these rough men did not forget him even when they were far enough from home, but spent part of their hardly earned wages in a present—a big strong cheese perhaps—with which, as he said, he had to contend all through the winter. It did not take Dr. Smyth so very long to win this feeling of affection and gratitude from the people. This came out strongly when, after six or seven years' heavy work, he broke down in health, and was advised that a long absence from home, a sea voyage if possible to be included, was necessary. The difficulties in his way seemed insurmountable. There was the question of the large sum of money necessary, and there was also the fact that as

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dispensary doctor he was not his own master. But already he had obtained such a hold upon the hearts of those amongst whom he worked that a determined effort was made to make it possible for him to go. His friends subscribed about £100, and the Glenties Board granted sufficient leave of absence. Before he started he received several gratifying proofs of the estimation in which he was held. Father Bernard Walker, at that time parish priest of Burtonport, put upon paper his personal feelings about his friend. Amongst other things, he said : " I have known him since his boyhood, and I certify that his reputation has been at all times of the highest order, unsullied by any stain, worthy of the respectable family to which he belongs, and worthy of the public favour which he enjoys to the full.

" In allusion to his abilities as a practitioner, I need only say that I have had constant opportunities during the past seven years of observing the gentle care, the deep interest, and the eminent skill which he uniformly exhibited towards his patients in the many and varied cases which came before him ; and indeed many and varied they have been, for

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alone and unaided he had to attend in all their ills a population of some twelve thousand, scattered over a district of some fourteen miles radius.

“ I am rather at a loss for words to express my estimate of his worth in every way. In his profession he has been eminently successful, and has secured the abiding confidence of the community at large. In his private relations he is a kind, agreeable companion, a trusty friend, a respectable and respected citizen.”

Besides this valuable testimony, Dr. Smyth received an illuminated address signed by some of the leading inhabitants, in which they speak of the intelligence, zeal, and high efficiency which characterised his official career. The address concludes thus: “ But it was only when directly brought in contact with you that we could become aware in how large a degree you possessed those qualities which we value in a friend and admire in a doctor.”

If a right estimation of Dr. Smyth's nature has been formed, it will be guessed that these final words were most of all appreciated by him. Surely it is a remarkable thing that such words as have been quoted should have been used of

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a young man of nine-and-twenty after no more than seven years' residence. They read like the description of a man who had spent a lifetime in building up his reputation and cementing his friendships.

Some words that have been written lately by the Rector of Dunglow perhaps help to account for the feeling for Dr. Smyth which existed even thirteen years ago :

“Every one who came in contact with him readily acknowledged him as a man of power. He attracted to himself natures the most divergent. He possessed the confidence of nearly every one. Probably he was in possession of the secrets of more than half the parish. He was a sort of father confessor, and it was principally for advice and comfort that the tales of trouble were poured into his ear. He must have known how high he stood in the public estimation, but he never seemed conscious of it. He was the most modest of men.”

The reason for the presentation of the above-mentioned address and Father Bernard Walker's testimonial is to be found in the fact that it was greatly feared that Dr. Smyth would not return

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to live at Burtonport. In explanation of this, and in order to obtain a true idea of his state of health, nothing better can be done than to quote from a most interesting paper which has been written by his friend Dr. James Little, of St. Stephen's Green, Dublin. He states: "He called to consult me about his health in 1888 or 1889. He had suffered from a persistent cough, and feared he was going into consumption. He also suffered much from rheumatic pains which the damp air of Burtonport seemed to provoke. He explained to me the difficulties of his position. He had settled down and married, and had then several children. He had, indeed, the dispensary at Burtonport, but any opportunity of adding to the scanty pay he received from it by private practice might be said not to exist. Men who could pay [at that time] within ten miles of Burtonport might also be counted on the fingers of one hand, and summer visitors were few and healthy, so that it seemed impossible for him to educate his children or make any provision for his own declining years. Even then I was strongly in favour of his leaving Ireland and seeking a home more favourable to his own health, where



## A HERO OF DONEGAL

there would be at least a possibility of his making an income sufficient to enable him to educate his children. . . .

“I was in favour of his taking a bold step and settling down in one of the great English manufacturing towns, where the talents which I plainly saw Dr. Smyth possessed might find remunerative exercise. Against this, however, it was only too evident his health opposed an insuperable obstacle. Everything showed that his own dread of consumption was well founded, and to exchange the pure though damp air of Donegal for the smoky atmosphere of Manchester or Birmingham or for the fog of London seemed only likely to seal his fate. We talked the matter over and discussed the advantage to his health of a long sea voyage, and the possibility that he might discover in some distant land health for himself and an opening for the young family which had arisen around him. He determined on going to British Columbia, being led to think of it by the prospect of an introduction to some people there. . . .

“For a long time I did not hear anything of him. Then I had a letter written on his return



## VOYAGE TO BRITISH COLUMBIA

telling me of his adventurous voyage. The letter was one of the most graphic I ever read. He described his journey by the Northern Pacific Railway in the depth of winter across the great continent, his disappointment with the climate of British Columbia, his acquaintance with a young English gentleman [Mr. Scott] in San Francisco, and their determination to come home in a small sailing-ship."

[With reference to this voyage it is interesting to note that he left Londonderry in October 1889, went to Quebec and so through Canada to Vancouver. On the return journey he and Mr. Scott took a passage on board the *Dochra*—a barque laden with tinned salmon. She sailed on December 26, and arrived at Liverpool on May 12—thus taking four and a half months on the voyage! Fortunately Dr. Smyth delighted in the sea, and employed his time in making mats and sails and doing carpentering work with the sailors. He returned home in a wonderfully improved state of health.]

"There is a great difference between physical strength and constitutional vigour. Though Smyth, brought up in the Donegal highlands, and always accustomed to boating, fishing,

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

and shooting, looked a perfect Hercules, and although fear was unknown to him, he was a delicate man. Like many large men he was often ailing. He had pains, and often caught cold. He had a good deal of illness in his family, and affectionate and loving as he was to all, he was often nurse and doctor and cook to his ailing children.

“The difficulties of a dispensary doctor in the wilds of Donegal can hardly be imagined. Long drives in torrents of rain, the absence in the homes of his patients of any kind of convenience, the ignorance and prejudices of the people. The celebrated African traveller, Mungo Park, once said, ‘I have been a parish doctor in the highlands, and a lonely wanderer in the wilds of South Africa. I prefer the latter position.’”

## CHAPTER VIII

HIS ATTACHMENT TO THE CHURCH—HIS  
GENEROSITY — HIS WORK AS A MAGIS-  
TRATE—HIS TREATMENT BY THE BOARD  
OF GUARDIANS

It has been shown that Dr. Smyth was a loyalist who was not afraid to let his political opinions have practical demonstration in a most disloyal district. As a further instance of this it may be stated that during the Boer war he raised a sum of £20 in Burtonport—a strong pro-Boer locality—for the widows of those who were killed in South Africa. It will give some idea of the almost brutal ill-feeling in the place on the subject of the war when it is known that some persons thought it “fun” to send a false message to the coastguard station to the effect that General Buller had met with a far more serious reverse than any yet experienced. The

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telegram stated the loss of a great number of guns, a large total of killed, and a simply huge number of prisoners. It fell to the lot of one of the doctor's little boys to bring the news to Roshine Lodge. He told it with a serious look upon his face, but added (greatly to his father's delight), "I don't believe such a great lot of British soldiers would give themselves up to the Boers." It was just at this time that a strong pro-Boer met Dr. Smyth and advised him to put crape round his hat, adding that the English soldiers never had been any good. "What about the Crimea?" said the doctor. "Oh," said the man, "the French helped them there." "Well, then," was the answer, "what about Waterloo?" The doctor's loyalty came out very strong on the subject of the war. He knew every detail from the first engagement, and could give a verbal history of the whole campaign—a thing which very few Englishmen could accomplish.

But he was not only a strong loyalist, but also a strong supporter of the Episcopal Church of Ireland. On this subject he did not argue with the people as he did about politics, but his feeling was none the less deep. The Rector of

## HIS ATTACHMENT TO THE CHURCH

Dunglow could always rely on his most active sympathy and help. He would readily subscribe to every object connected with the church. He never had to be asked for a subscription. He always came forward and asked to be allowed to give. He loved the little parish church by the water's edge at Dunglow, and was rarely absent from Divine Service except when professional duties called him away. It was a five-mile drive to church, and he was the only resident at Burtonport who attended both services—*i.e.*, the one at Dunglow in the morning and that at Burtonport in the afternoon. No doubt the fact that so many of his little children lay in the churchyard at the former place helped to form a special tie with the little church. He was a welcome and most regular attendant at every vestry meeting, and his advice was eagerly sought and invariably followed. He was unanimously chosen to represent the parish at the diocesan synod, and, in addition, filled the responsible position of Parochial Nominator. He was also treasurer of the parish funds. He delighted in trying to improve the fabric and arrangements of the church. Two recent improvements he was specially anxious to carry

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

out. One of these was the removal of a huge unsightly stove which blocked the entrance to the chancel. He greatly desired to see this replaced by an underground heating apparatus, and it was largely due to his energy that the work was undertaken. It was actually in progress at the time of his death, and, owing to the deep excavations within the building, it was very nearly an impossibility to hold the funeral service inside the church. The difficulty was, however, happily, overcome. The second improvement which he had desired to see was the widening of the chancel—a work which still remains to be done.

Not unnaturally Dr. Smyth was anxious to provide better accommodation at Burtonport for the Protestant community which, owing to the coastguard station, the police barrack, and the new railway, is considerable. There had never been any school for their children, or church in which they might worship. Mr. Pomeroy, the agent, very kindly placed a large room at the disposal of the rector for Sunday-school and service, and this is still being used. It is a long bare room with cement walls and brown beams and rafters, and on a winter

## HIS GENEROSITY

afternoon presents a most picturesque appearance, such, indeed, as might inspire a painter of the Newlyn School. The waning light finds its way in through the windows along one side and blends with the yellow rays from the oil lamps hung here and there from the rafters. In one corner is the little wooden desk—not unlike a music stand—which supports the parson's book as he stands behind it in his long white surplice. The centre of the room is empty, but at the further end half a dozen long wooden benches are arranged in rows so close together as to make kneeling an impossibility, while against the wall on the opposite side to the windows is another bench which takes the overflow of the congregation. The six benches are filled as full as they will hold with devout and attentive worshippers, amongst whom the coastguards are conspicuous as the lamplight catches the brass buttons on their uniform. It is their caps also which form the chief "decoration" as they hang from nails upon the rafters above their heads. They are accompanied by wives and children, and indeed they and their families take a prominent part in the proceedings. They lead the hymns to wonderful old rambling psalm tunes, and it



## A HERO OF DONEGAL

is one of their number who holds the delf plate at the door and takes the collection as the congregation streams out.

It is a scene that has its counterpart in some of the more remote districts of Scotland and Ireland, but is rapidly becoming past history everywhere. Soon it will be so at Burtonport. Dr. Smyth and others were not content that the nearest church should be five miles off, and the nearest Protestant school more like six, and it was determined to build a combined church and school in the place itself. He, the rector, and J. A. Pomeroy, Esq., J.P., became the committee to carry out the scheme. He worked for several years endeavouring to enlist sympathy on behalf of this object, and was among the first to subscribe. His love for children had much to do with his wish to see such a building erected. It grieved him greatly to see the education of some thirty or forty Protestant children practically neglected. He had himself organised a Sunday-school for them, and taught in it whenever he was able. But he longed for some regular and properly established church and school where the young as well as the old might gather together. At last he grew



## HIS WORK AS A MAGISTRATE

impatient of the delay which had been protracted over several years, and he urged the other members of the committee to sign the contract for the building to be begun, although the funds had not been fully provided. A site was obtained on the Burtonport side of Roshine Lodge, within sight, indeed, of some part of the grounds, and only last September, two months before his death, the foundation-stone was laid. During those two months he was indefatigable in visiting the works. In that district materials are scarce, and latterly labour has been difficult to obtain. Dr. Smyth was always ready with help and encouragement to the workmen when they were confronted by these and other difficulties; indeed he more than once went off himself in search of men and materials that the building might not be delayed. It seems specially sad that he should not have lived long enough to see more than the walls just beginning to rise above the ground.

Besides all the work entailed by duties such as those that have just been described and those belonging to his profession, he was a justice of the peace, and had frequently to sit upon the bench. He had many qualities which specially

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

fitted him for this position. He was well read, with a great knowledge of politics and history, and was therefore wide-minded and able to take a large view of matters brought before him. It is the misfortune of that district that the people generally have come under the influence of two sorts of agitators. The one the professional agitator, who knows better, but whose livelihood depends upon his success ; the other the ignorant and extremely narrow-minded enthusiast who never lets what little mind he has got stray from the one subject of the hated Saxon. It was, then, invaluable to have the influence of an educated man with an evenly balanced mind in the position of a magistrate. Mr. John Morley, that man of theories, had appointed a good many men to the bench whose qualifications were certainly not those of Dr. Smyth. It has been said of him that "he possessed keen discrimination of character, which enabled him to analyse in a remarkable manner the habits and traits of character of the people with whom he came in contact. He was a student of human nature, and his shrewdness of judgment invariably led him to the most accurate conclusions. Perhaps it was this phase in his character—his

## HIS WORK AS A MAGISTRATE

soundness of judgment and strong common sense—that made his brother magistrates welcome him on the bench as a valuable colleague. He was not an orator, but when he did speak he commanded respect not only from the excellency of his character, but also from the fact that he possessed a most unbiased judgment. He had the rare faculty of divesting himself of local prejudices, and he carefully weighed all evidence before drawing his conclusions.”

It might be thought that the fact of his being a magistrate would in some degree alienate him from the people. This was by no means the case. They had the most complete trust in him, and, more than that, they knew that he would do everything to help them that he honestly could. It was no uncommon thing when he was starting to drive to the court to see two or three people running to catch him that they might tell him all about the trouble which they had got into. A more striking proof of the hold that he obtained upon their affection could scarcely exist.

It is sad to think that there should have been in any kind of way another side to the picture. But as it is hoped to present a truthful repre-

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

sentation of Dr. Smyth's life at Burtonport, it is necessary to make brief reference to less pleasant matters, and perhaps this is as good an opportunity as another in which to do so.

After all that has been said of Dr. Smyth's popularity and of the wonderful work he was enabled to do in his vast district, it is almost incredible that any attempts should have been made to bully him or in any way to add to his anxieties. At the same time it is well known that the mere fact of a man possessing real greatness of character and winning wide influence over his fellows is generally sufficient to raise up enemies. At all events it is true, and must therefore be recorded here, although it is a most discreditable fact, that certain persons, members for the most part of the Glenties Board of Guardians, were responsible for making his life a burden so far as they possibly could. This Board and Dr. Smyth were in the position of employer and employed, and of this state of things full advantage was taken. The avowed object was to get rid of him from the district ! The reasons were not very far to seek.

Although with the large majority of the people the fact that he was a loyalist and a

## TREATMENT BY BOARD OF GUARDIANS

Protestant counted as nothing against his devoted services, yet there were some to whom it was a source of constant irritation that the man of strongest personality and greatest influence in the place should hold these views. That was one reason. Then there were strong local jealousies in trade matters, and the fact that Dr. Smyth was related to Mr. Keown, the chief merchant of the place, and was, indeed, the lessee of his business premises, formed reason number two. Next must be put the petty jealousy to be found in some folk's hearts embittering them against any one greater and better than themselves. Lastly, and chief reason of all, was the fact that he was a bit of a reformer, anxious to get rid of abuses and to abate nuisances, and there is nothing which some people so greatly fear and dislike as being disturbed in their old-fashioned, muddly ways.

For a long time Dr. Smyth had been concerned at the state of the drainage of Burtonport, and the insanitary condition of the harbour owing to the discharge of fish offal near the pier. It is not to be wondered at. Typhus fever had appeared again and again in the district, and in the fight against it which, as a

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medical man, he was bound to make, such matters were of vital importance. Many minor efforts had been made during the last five or six years by members of the Glenties Board to worry Dr. Smyth into resigning, so that a man might be obtained in his place who would be more of their own kidney and would let things alone. The excuse hitherto had been that from time to time he had been unwell—overwork the usual cause. Last year, however, a determined effort was made by his opponents. Dr. Smyth had reported once more the insanitary condition of the Burtonport drainage. Mr. Barnhill, a civil engineer, had also been employed to inspect the state of things, and he stated that “except for earthen closets the sewage matter was conveyed to the street, and allowed to lie there until washed away by the rain-water into the harbour.” Will it be believed that on the motion of a tradesman of Burtonport itself the Board decided to send the following resolution to the Local Government Board, viz. : “That Burtonport is no town, that the sewerage does not require any further improvement, and that we enter our protest against the continuous reports

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of Dr. Smyth. We have no confidence in his reports, and we must ask the Local Government Board to relieve us of such an officer, and get some sanitary officer who has no interest in the local property"? This last sentence referred no doubt to the fact that he was lessee of Mr. Keown's premises—a matter which was a mere family arrangement, and had no connection whatever with the business.

This was in the summer of last year (1901). Now comes the curious sequel, which can be traced through the medium of the reports in the Londonderry papers. After Dr. Smyth's death in November last, the very same individual who had proposed the vote of want of confidence in him a few months before, was the proposer of a vote of condolence to be sent by the same Board of Guardians to Mrs. Smyth in which the following words occurred: "Dr. Smyth was at all times a most efficient officer. . . . We are assured that his many acts of kindness which have been so well known all over the County Donegal will be long remembered, particularly by the people of the Rosses amongst whom he so long and so faithfully laboured." It is difficult to imagine the same man moving



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and the same Board passing the two motions within a few months. But the explanation doubtless is that the personality of Dr. Smyth was as irresistible to these men as to others, and that when there was no longer any fear of his reforms troubling them (or so they thought) they allowed their admiration of the man to have its way.

But a stranger thing yet has happened since. It will be remembered that the Board solemnly stated that in their opinion the sewerage of Burtonport required no improvement. In January 1902, six months later, this same Board met again, and passed a resolution that all the improvements previously suggested and many others of a far-reaching kind should be immediately carried out. The fact is that the Local Government Board were by no means content with the previous action of the Glenties Guardians, and sent Dr. McCarthy, their medical officer of health, and another inspector to make a new investigation and to report to them. These gentlemen sent an exhaustive statement of the state of things they found, bearing out and more than bearing out Dr. Smyth's contentions. The result is that



## TREATMENT BY BOARD OF GUARDIANS

all for which he had so long striven is at last to be done by order of the very Board which refused to listen to him, though, alas ! too late to rejoice his heart as it would assuredly have done could he have lived to see it.

## CHAPTER IX

### ARRANMORE

IT was Arranmore, that beautiful island which lay across the "roads" and on which he gazed from his favourite "look-out" at Roshine Lodge, that occupied the warmest corner of Dr. Smyth's heart. It seemed to have some subtle fascination for him, even apart from the interests which grew up and helped to bind him to her. And it is not surprising. There was the charm which an island always possesses especially for those who would rather sail a boat than drive a horse. Then the natural features are of a kind to attract a lover of nature. From the one or two little bays and anchorages on the east and south sides of the island the ground rises quickly, and a few minutes' climb brings a magnificent land- and sea-scape into view. The winding paths among the little houses and up



South Side, Arranmore

(from a photograph by H. A. Tulcy, Esq.)



## ARRANMORE

the mountain side are romantic and interesting, while when the high lands are reached there is a sense of freedom and vastness and solitude which it is difficult to obtain on the more populous mainland. Up here there are many mountain sheep, for there are no little farms for them to injure, and, as the eye looks away over the sheer cliffs which bound the island on the west and realises that there is nothing but the vast Atlantic stretching away for two or three thousand miles below, the presence of these little creatures is just sufficient to soften the desolation without impairing the feeling of awe which the spot inspires.

Nothing William Smyth liked better than to climb on to these heights, and wander from point to point, or sit and gaze upon the magnificence of the prospect. Naturally a most religious man, he gave expression to his religion more by deeds than words, but on more than one occasion when upon the hillside of Arranmore his tongue could not keep silence. It was here that a feeling often came to him which is no uncommon one to those who are looking upon a wide and beautiful landscape: a feeling that it was good to be there, and that

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it was a fitting temple for the worship of the Creator. He and a sister were there one lovely day, and to her remark that she felt that she would like to say her prayers, he answered, "I always do when I am here."

Another record kept by a close friend of his tells of the same natural turning to religious thoughts. He says: "On the last Sunday I spent with him (Smyth) he had a sick call to Arranmore. It was a beautiful morning, calm and bright. The sea and the mountains were very beautiful. We walked some distance on the island after he had visited his patient, and everywhere he received the same kindly greeting. . . . Returning we sat on the sandhills to enjoy the beautiful view. Our talk turned on the Second Coming of our Lord. He said that he believed that Christ would come to receive a triumph; that the world was improving, and would in time be ready to receive Him." This was just an indication of the strong, courageous heart of the man, looking at the best side of things, doing the best he could, and expecting the best results under the Hand of a wise and loving Deity.

But it was not only the natural charm of the

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island that attracted him. The inhabitants, though perhaps even slightly behind the dwellers on the mainland in matters connected with domestic sanitation, are a fine race. The women, tall, dark, fresh-complexioned, carry themselves with an admirable mixture of gracefulness and strength. The men are a keen and hardy-looking race, esteemed the best and most daring boatmen on the coast of Donegal. Perhaps they are so now! When Dr. Smyth was alive they would one and all have owned that a better man than they was to be found at Roshine Lodge. Often and often when the doctor was wanted, and when no boat dared to put out to cross the "roads" from Arranmore to fetch him, a telegram would be sent in the sure expectation that he would bring his own boat over if it was within the power of man to do so. Sometimes it would seem possible for an Arran boat to get to Burtonport, but the men would doubt whether they could bring her back. "Ach!" they would say, "but we shall be having the doctor with us then," and the doctor they reckoned worth two extra hands any day. No doubt these island boatmen found an easy way into the affections of

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Dr. Smyth. But he loved them all, women and children too, and none the less that they are a simple and credulous folk. All through the Rosses the belief in ghosts and fairies is prevalent, but here on Arranmore there is a special and a more beautiful form of superstition. The island is also called *Arran a Noin*, or Arran of the Saints, and the inhabitants believe that on a clear day they can from its shores behold *Hy Brazil*, or Paradise!

Another tie between Dr. Smyth and this island was his close connection with the life-boat stationed there. It was chiefly owing to his exertions that the boat was obtained in 1890, and he acted as honorary secretary. There had been none nearer than Lough Foyle, very far away on the extreme north of Ireland, between the counties of Donegal and Derry. As a matter of fact, the Arranmore boat has had little to do. Few vessels come in close enough to that rocky shore, and those that do are sturdy steamships for whose safety every precaution is taken. For instance, the dangerous Stag rocks off the island of Owey, of which mention has already been made, are illuminated by a powerful light which shines



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upon them from a lighthouse at the northern point of Arranmore.

The cox of the lifeboat is Captain Hugh O'Donnell, one of the best and boldest seamen on the island, and a man who holds a considerable position there as an owner of fishing-boats and of the most important store upon the island, besides being a member of the Glenties Board of Guardians. Dr. Smyth, in order to encourage the fishing industry, went into partnership with O'Donnell in his fishing-boats, and even if, as has been suggested by some, it was not a specially profitable undertaking, still it formed another link with the island of Arranmore. But not only did Dr. Smyth delight in wandering hither and thither over the island, but he took even greater pleasure in sailing round it in his boat. There are many caves on the west and north of the island, and often in calm weather he would take a party of ladies and children to investigate these cool and mysterious caverns. But another object took him there now and then. It has been said that the cliffs are precipitous on the western side, and consequently there are no inhabitants on that part of the island at all. That fact and the existence of

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the caves has made the place the haunt of many seals. Dr. Smyth was a dead shot with a rifle, and it was a favourite form of sport to try to get a few shots at these creatures as they lay basking on the rocky ledges. That he was successful is proved by the many trophies which he possessed formed of seal skins. He had bags made of them, and several are to be seen mounted as rugs in the drawing-room at Roshine Lodge. One of these—an enormous skin covering nearly the whole of the sofa—has a story belonging to it. It has been written out by Henry J. Devitt, a boy who was staying at Burtonport, and used frequently to play with Dr. Smyth's two boys, Willie and Hugh. Here is the story:

“One day Dr. Smyth asked me to go round Arranmore with him. He, Hugh and I went in the small punt across the Roads to Leebgarrow, and the sea was so calm that we could see the sandy bottom and fishes swimming about quite distinctly.

“When we got to Leebgarrow [a small bay opposite to Burtonport] the lifeboat had been launched, and we got into her. The little punt was fastened to her stern, and we started round

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the island, rowed by sixteen men all with red caps and cork jackets. We went inside Calf Island, and soon afterwards passed the Head of Arran. . . .

“ We now neared the lighthouse, with a great many steps leading down to the sea. A little past here one of the crew told the doctor that he knew of a very good cave for seals, so the doctor, Captain Hugh O'Donnell, one of the crew, Hugh, and I got into the little punt and rowed to the entrance of the cave, where we landed Captain O'Donnell with his gun. We then proceeded into the cave as far as the place where it divided. We lit some lifeboat signals and took the passage to the right. Gradually the cave got lower and lower, till we had to stoop our heads. All at once the roof rose suddenly, and we could see the beach a short distance ahead. We were all on the look-out for seals, when the doctor saw one lying on a ledge just above us. Before he had time to fire it dived, striking the water very close to the boat. Then we saw two seals on the beach, and the doctor fired at and thought he had killed both. He got out of the boat, dragged them from the beach, hoisted them into the boat, and

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got on board himself. We had started back into the darkness of the cave when we suddenly found we had no more lights. The doctor, however, remembered that he had put one down in the boat just where the seals were lying. He stretched out his hand to get it, but quickly withdrew it, for at that moment one of the seals began to growl. The doctor then picked up his gun to shoot the brute again, but, fearing that the bullet might go through the bottom of the boat, changed his mind and clubbed the seals with his gun instead. This stopped the growling. Meantime, Hugh and I, who were in the middle of the boat, moved up into the bows, where the lifeboat man was trying to propel the boat like a curragh [a coracle]. The extra weight caused the gunwale to go under water, and the man discovering this pushed us back into the middle of the boat while he worked her slowly forward, keeping one hand in front of him to avoid hitting his head against the top of the cave. We got safely out at last, when the doctor discovered that he had broken his gun. . . . So ended a very exciting and enjoyable day."

There is a charming simplicity about the way

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in which this adventure—for adventure it really was—is told. There is great danger in searching for seals in the caves, for when disturbed on their high ledges they dive suddenly and sometimes overturn a boat—an accident which as nearly as possible happened on this occasion. Then the position of affairs in the small punt with so many passengers on board of her, including two wounded and growling seals, could have been anything but pleasant. The darkness added greatly to the danger, and the boat was evidently as nearly as possible swamped. It is the skin of one of these two big seals which is now on the sofa at Roshine.

Altogether it may be said that there was a good deal of romance connected with Arranmore which helped to give it its charm in Dr. Smyth's eyes. The very road-track over the shoulder of the hill towards the south which led to the dispensary and court-house, and with every stone on which he must have been familiar, is fascinating. And then the building itself which contains these two great institutions—the place where the doctor attends at regular intervals to see the patients who are well enough to come out, and the place where the magistrates sit to

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administer justice—what a romantic affair it is ! Probably there is not another like it in the British Isles. Alone it stands, decently withdrawn from the roadway, and upon a commanding site, but it is very little removed in dignity or convenience from the houses of the peasants, except for the windows which are numerous for its size, and for a certain prim look which its weather-stained walls and roof and its natural surroundings of grass and boulders cannot altogether destroy.

By the way, it is interesting to notice an experiment that is now being tried on the island, and that must interfere largely with the utility of the court-house. All police have been withdrawn. No one seems to know the reason. There are fifteen hundred inhabitants and at least half a dozen public houses, but at the present moment Arranmore is a land of complete liberty, which it may be feared will become licence should the experiment be long continued.

Another interesting fact is that an entirely new state of things with regard to land tenure is just beginning on the island. Originally belonging to the Marquis Conyngham, it was purchased by the Charley family, and from them





Dispensary and Courthouse, Arranmore





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passed into the hands of the Land Courts. Now the Congested Districts Board has bought it. Tenants whose rent is in arrears will be allowed to compound at a low rate, and in all cases the land will pass, after a certain number of years' rental has been paid, into the hands of the tenant. Meantime, the Board will receive the rents, but not one halfpenny will go off the island. All the money received is to be spent upon improving the houses and the land, so that a bright future *ought* to be before Arranmore. Whether the people will make good use of such a chance as they have got, time alone will show.

## CHAPTER X

THE TYPHUS PATIENTS ON ARRANMORE  
—HIS DEVOTION—HIS FALLING A VICTIM  
TO THE FEVER—HIS DEATH AND FUNERAL

TYPHUS fever was no unfamiliar visitor to the Rosses, and many had been its victims. Like the Boers in the South African war it had not been content with taking toll of the rank and file, but had seemed to make a special point of attacking the officers in the shape of doctors, nurses and priests who opposed it. Of doctors, it has been seen that Dr. Smyth's immediate predecessor at Burtonport was a victim, so was Dr. Creery, who was dispensary doctor at Dunglow before Dr. Smyth took the combined districts, and so also was Dr. Doherty, who held the same post until four years ago, when he was succeeded by Dr. Gardiner, the present holder of the office. Yet another victim was

## THE TYPHUS PATIENTS ON ARRANMORE

dispensary doctor at Ardara, where it will be remembered that Dr. Smyth was at one time stationed, and there were others besides in further parts of Donegal. But in spite of this, and in spite of the awful scenes which he had from time to time witnessed—he once attended *seven* typhus patients lying on the floor of one small room—and in spite of his having stated that he did not believe that, if he took the fever, he should recover from it, Dr. Smyth never seems to have lost courage or seriously contemplated the likelihood of being struck down himself. He would sometimes refer to the chances of death in other ways. Speaking to a friend about his determination to continue his work in the Rosses rather than seek a more prominent sphere, he said: “Here I shall live and die and have my being, and then be buried in a bog-hole and nothing more be heard of me.” Being buried in a bog-hole was a fate that might easily have befallen him in his long night tramps to distant sick beds had it not been for his intimate knowledge of every inch of the country.

Another prophecy in which he sometimes indulged was that some day he would leave his bones in Arran Roads, and often and often he

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crossed them when (as they say in that country) every one else was "cowed" to go, and no other boat but his would venture out. But neither was this to be his fate, though there was indeed in the words a sort of dim foretelling of those last scenes with which the Roads of Arranmore had so much to do.

It has already been told that from time to time he had been laid up with illnesses, of which an attack of rheumatic fever some ten years ago was the most serious. In spite of his magnificent physique he was extremely liable to break down under stress of work. Yet he never shrank from taking up and carrying through anything which seemed his duty. Early in last year an illustration of his readiness to help is found in a letter he wrote to his friend, Mr. Stevenson:

"ROSHINE LODGE, BURTONPORT,

"*Jan.* 15, 1901.

"DEAR STEVENSON,

"I have had a very busy time here since a week before Christmas. The small-pox paid a visit to Lettercagh (you may remember riding up to it once with me). It was treated

## THE TYPHUS PATIENTS ON ARRANMORE

as measles, and eleven persons got it, including the doctor. I had to do *locum tenens*, as no other person would face small-pox for three guineas per week ! Fortunately, I had the disease when at college, so was not concerned for myself. The scare was great for a while, and I vaccinated about seven hundred in a couple of weeks, in addition to all other work. . . . My wife invites you down for a week whenever you can get away, as she says it will do me good. Are not women selfish? . . .

“ Yours sincerely,

“ WM. SMYTH.”

This small-pox work was evidently undertaken in another dispensary district, and was entirely additional to his regular duties. It is not therefore a matter of great surprise to find that in the spring of that year he was obliged to take a holiday, and went for a rest to his old home at Mount Charles. He came back from there on April 30, rather against the wishes of the doctor who was attending him, and who thought him not yet well enough to take up his arduous work. But he had promised his neighbour, Dr. Gardiner of Dunglow, to be back in time

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

for the arrival of the latter's youngest child, whose birth was expected on May 1, and it would not have been like Dr. Smyth to disappoint a friend.

Then came a summer during which there was much alternating of light and shadow. He had the joy of having his boys back from his own old school at Raphoe for their holidays, and many were the days spent in boating, fishing, and swimming in their company. But Mrs. Smyth was far from well and caused him great anxiety. Her baby was to be born in September, and he foresaw a critical time. And critical, indeed, the occasion proved to be. Here is a little note which the doctor sent to Mrs. O'Donnell of Arranmore :

“ROSHINE LODGE,  
“*Tuesday morning.*

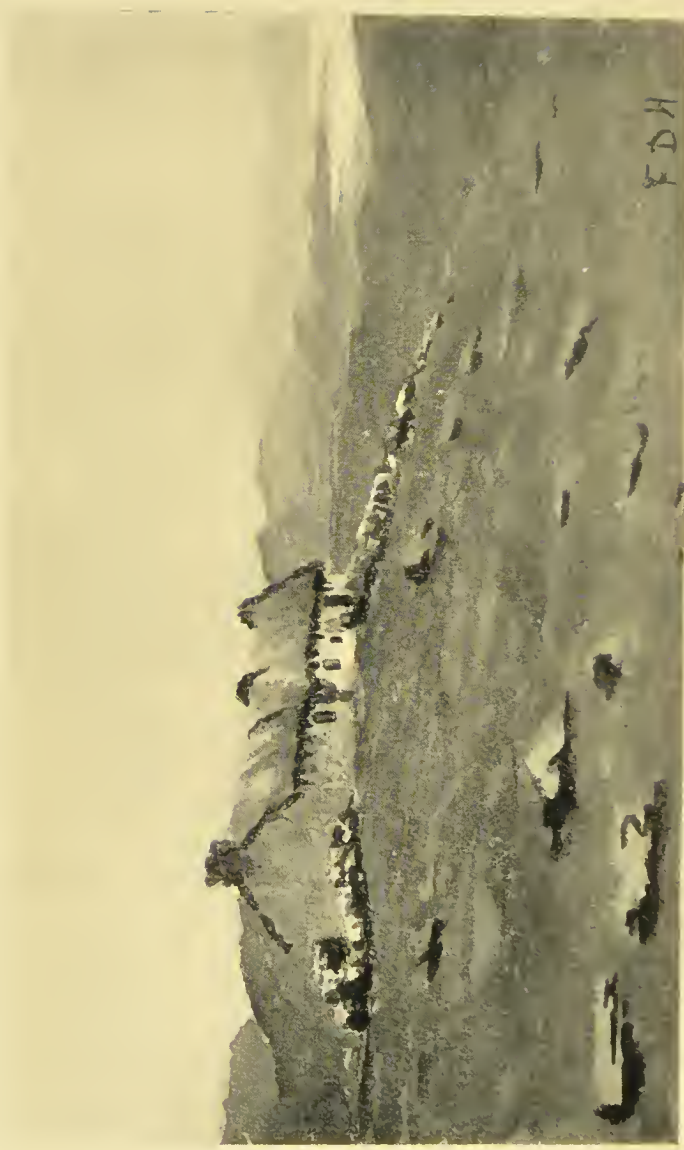
“DEAR MRS. O'DONNELL,

“E. was delivered of a little boy about 6 A.M. Unfortunately the mother and child are very weak. The little one can hardly live out the day.

“Yours sincerely,  
“WM. SMYTH.”







Joe Gallagher's House

## THE TYPHUS PATIENTS ON ARRANMORE

But that poor little fellow is alive to-day, while the big strong man, who wrote these words with an anxious heart, has been three months in his grave.

Altogether it may be easily gathered that the first nine months of the year 1901 were not a very good preparation for a battle with the old enemy, typhus fever. But when on October 13 he was first summoned to Arranmore with a message that the fever had broken out, it was with no particular feelings of alarm that he took his boat and went across. He found that the victims were entirely among a clan of people called Gallagher, who occupied several poor little houses towards the south-west of the island not far from the Chapel Strand, a bit of level beach which takes its name from a Roman Catholic chapel hard by. It was not altogether easy to account for the outbreak. Joe Gallagher, who was himself a sufferer with his wife and all three of his children, declared that on his return from the harvest in Scotland he found his wife down with it. Still, it is possible that it may have been brought over by some who returned at an earlier date, but to the ordinary observer the insanitary condition of these little

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houses seems to be cause enough. It is in this family of Gallaghers that the interest of the story centres, as will be seen.

Dr. Smyth greatly hoped that the outbreak would be of a mild kind, and was extremely anxious that it should not spread. In this he was thoroughly backed up by the terror-stricken neighbours, who avoided the houses where the fever was and boycotted all who had anything to do with the place. How strong this feeling ran may be gathered from the fact that it is thought in Burtonport a wonderful thing that Dr. Smyth's manservant did not leave him at once, and, indeed, the boy himself tells with some pride that he remained with the doctor all through. The people on Arranmore gave the houses of the poor Gallaghers an uncommonly wide berth, and would do nothing whatever to help. What a wide difference there is between this and the almost equally reprehensible conduct of the inhabitants of an ordinary English village. There, if a child gets diphtheria, every woman in the place crowds to have a look at the poor thing and to give her advice, altogether oblivious of the fact that any one of them may take

## HIS DEVOTION

the complaint and so convey it to their own children.

Dr. Smyth determined, in order to limit the chances of spreading infection, on two things. First, that he would attend to the patients entirely himself. This was the reason why the district nurse did not help him. Secondly, that if it were possible he would get the fever cases removed to the Glenties hospital, where they would have a better chance of recovery. It was in this last matter that he found his chief difficulty. In the first he was readily allowed his own way. Day by day the doctor rowed himself across entirely alone. His best friends among the people, as he passed down the street to the pier, crossed over to the other side or pretended not to see him. Not one would have gone in the boat with him if he had begged him to. Alone he moored his boat on the other side, and made his solitary way over the ridge of hill dividing the cottages from the sea. He was always laden, sometimes heavily, with the various things he was bringing for the fever patients, for he was their doctor, nurse, and only friend. It was easy enough for him to ensure that he and he only should attend the

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

cases ; what was more difficult was to persuade them to go to the hospital. It was not unnatural. These simple, ignorant people had the usual dread of the unknown. They could not tell what might be in store for them at Glenties. Then they feared for their houses in their absence. Would they be pulled down or even burnt, as some had been, as the surest way of disinfecting them? Dr. Smyth had to promise that he would do everything he could to prevent this. But even so he failed to persuade any to go except Joe Gallagher and his family. From them he at last obtained a reluctant consent, and then began the difficulties of transport. The authorities would send their ambulance the twenty Irish miles to Burtonport, but between the sick people and that spot there were three miles of sea. But that did not trouble the doctor much if only he could get a boat. He could not manage the *Stella* single-handed ; his little punt was too small to carry such a load in safety. So he began to ask one and another for the loan of a boat, almost supplicating at last for the boon, and offering to pay anything they liked. But all in vain. They told him they did not want money from him, but neither

## HIS DEVOTION

would they risk infecting any one of their boats. Was there a boat that he could buy outright? Oh, yes! there *were* old boats of course. So then he applied to the Local Board to purchase one for the purpose. They bought a crazy, unseaworthy craft that had not been in the water for two years. Well, it might serve the purpose. Up to this time Dr. Smyth had been absolutely single-handed in the work. He was now joined by another brave man, Dr. McCarthy of Londonderry, medical officer of health for Donegal. He arrived in time to take a share in the final act of this most pathetic drama.

All arrangements had been made, and on a given day the two doctors rowed the rickety old boat across. They pulled her up on a deserted bit of shore, for there would have been an outcry raised had they landed at the Chapel Strand nearest to Gallagher's house. Then there was a sad little procession formed, which climbed over the rough hill-side at the back, and so by unfrequented ways to the spot where the boat was moored. There were the two doctors, Joe Gallagher himself, whom the fever had attacked most severely of all, and his



## A HERO OF DONEGAL

wife, while between them they managed to bring the three sick children, a girl of seven and two little boys of four and two. Dr. McCarthy was unused to rowing, and it was noticed by those who looked on from afar that now and again "the doctor" would put a hand over on to his friend's oar and give a haul at it to keep the boat in her course. Probably never has such a sight been seen as that crossing of the Roads of Arranmore! The islands of Enniscoo and Rutland had to be skirted as they went, and it was strange to see the terror of the people. Men were laying out nets upon the shore—the nets were dropped and the men ran hurriedly away. Women were spreading clothes to dry—the clothes were instantly left to the mercy of the winds. Lads were digging for bait in the sandy places—one and all turned tail and fled on the news that the doctor with his boat-load would pass by. At last they arrived at the deserted landing-place. The work was done. The patients were comfortably stowed away in the ambulance, and Dr. Smyth and Dr. McCarthy went off to Roshine Lodge. One more heroic deed had been added to the roll, though Dr. Smyth would have

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scorned to call his action heroic and his fellow worker would have shared his sentiment, though his hands were blistered and bleeding from the unaccustomed oar. Why, it has been asked, should Dr. Smyth have undertaken so much that lay outside his actual duty? He was only bound to doctor the patients: he need not have nursed them, and he certainly need not have rowed them across. But they who ask this question take a different view of duty from that which he always took. He did not think so much of what he *must* do as of what he *could* do. He was never cramped by the limits of legal obligation. He felt that anything he could do for others he was bound to do, and in that he rejoiced.

Hurrying up home on that eventful day he changed his clothes, for he was always extremely careful about infection, and had a bath. He came downstairs cheerful and hungry for his dinner. "He looked," says Mrs. Smyth, "the picture of health." It was the greatest satisfaction to him to have got the whole thing safely over. Just before the outbreak occurred he had been taking a great interest in the accounts of the Glasgow Exhibition. Mrs.

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Smyth was now a little stronger, and the poor little baby still alive. There was no reason why he should any longer delay to take the trip he had been promising himself, and pay a visit to the Exhibition.

Meantime, what had become of the crazy boat in which the crossing had been accomplished? Not many hours after they left her she sank; some say she was too rotten to hold together, others that she was cut adrift and scuttled by some unknown hand. But, whatever the cause, she perished as soon as her work was done.

To return to Dr. Smyth. He took a passage at once in one of the boats which ply three times a week between Burtonport and Glasgow, and sailed on Wednesday, November 6. He started full of life and spirits, like a schoolboy off for the holidays. He little knew that the deadly typhus poison had already got hold, and, imperceptible at first, was about rapidly to develop in his system. It would of course be foolish to try to determine the exact moment when the mischief was done. He was so continually with the Gallaghers and waited upon them so assiduously. Still, there was one

## HIS FALLING A VICTIM TO THE FEVER

occasion when it might well have happened. Some clothing which had been over the patients was hanging in front of the fire to dry. Dr. Smyth was passing close by, and in trying to move some of these things out of the way a shawl struck him on the face covering for a moment his mouth and nostrils. It is just possible that that moment proved fatal.

But, whatever the cause, he had not been long at sea before he began to feel unwell. The boat arrived at Glasgow about midday on Thursday, November 7. He was then so poorly that the captain of the steamer went with him to see him safely to his hotel. A telegram was sent home announcing his safe arrival, but nothing more. It must be remembered that he had often suffered pains and temporary illness, and he quite hoped at first that this was something of the kind. In the afternoon he managed to get as far as the Exhibition, but could not remain for more than a few minutes. Those few minutes he characteristically occupied in buying a beautiful enamelled brooch for Mrs. Smyth—now an invaluable memento. That evening he telegraphed home again, a most unusual and ominous proceeding. The telegram was simply

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to say he felt "very tired." Next day he felt that he must make the best of his way home. Illness of some kind was, he knew, in store, and he was so weary that, liked a tired child, his one thought was to get home to those who loved him. He returned by boat to Londonderry, taking the train from there to Fintown, the nearest station to Burtonport. He had telegraphed for his dogcart and favourite horse to meet him, and, ill as he was, he himself drove the fifteen miles to Roshine Lodge. And such a fifteen miles ! Not only are they Irish miles, but the first six or seven are most rugged and hilly. There is a big climb to the heights above Doocharry, and then a tremendous descent to the bridge over the Gweebarra River, a descent so steep that the tiny stream on the left of the road falls sheer over precipitous rocks, forming a waterfall small in volume but of considerable height. The bridge being crossed there is another arduous climb, and indeed it is some way before the road becomes at all level and easy. All this long and difficult way Dr. Smyth drove on Saturday, November 9, a day which is still remembered in these parts as one of the wettest and stormiest of all the year. Nothing

## HIS FALLING A VICTIM TO THE FEVER

could possibly have been worse for him. Apart from the weather, it is well known that physical exertion is extremely dangerous for any one struck down with typhus.

But even yet he could not bring himself to believe. Both he and Mrs. Smyth hoped on his arrival at home that the pain and illness were simply a return of his rheumatism. Mrs. Smyth was, nevertheless, anxious to send for Dr. Gardiner of Dunglow. But he would not hear of it on such an evening. "Time enough," he said, "to send for Dr. Gardiner when the weather shall clear up." In the night, however, he became so much worse that a messenger was sent post haste to summon his brother physician. It was then that the terrible doubt became a certainty. Dr. Gardiner found him with an excessively high temperature, higher indeed that night than at any other time during his illness. With a look of great anxiety, Dr. Smyth said : "What do you think it is?" "Typhus, I fear," was the reply. "Ah!" the sick man answered, "I was afraid ! I wish I had gone to the hospital at Derry ; but I hoped against hope."

The illness increased rapidly, and great fear

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was felt that heart failure would ensue. However, this was not the case. Up to the Tuesday night after his return, Mrs. Smyth nursed her husband herself, with the help of Dr. Gardiner and her brother-in-law, Mr. Keown, whose devotion entailed a prolonged boycott of his business premises by the terrified inhabitants. All this time Dr. Smyth was fully conscious, and his one thought was for others. He continually begged Mrs. Smyth to keep away from his head, and implored her not to fret. He more than once asked Mr. Keown not to come into his room for fear of infection, and the last words he said to him were: "Leave this room at once! If I could get up I would throw you downstairs!" On Tuesday, November 12, a nurse came and relieved Mrs. Smyth of some of the more difficult nursing, thus allowing her to devote more time to the poor little seven weeks' old baby—the only one of the children at home.

On Wednesday, November 13, Dr. Smyth sank into a state of semi-consciousness, though for the remainder of his illness he knew those about him from time to time. During the delirium which ensued it was evident that he was more than once sailing his boat, the *Stella*, in



## HIS DEATH AND FUNERAL

the Arranmore regatta, while now and then he would talk of his horse, declaring that there was none so good as he, showing what were the ruling passions of his life. On the following Tuesday morning, November 19, the fourteenth day, his temperature rose to a point at which recovery became hopeless ; pneumonia set in, his right lung becoming consolidated, and that evening he died.

The shock to the whole district was indescribable. People refused at first to believe it possible. He was so closely mixed up with the whole life of the place that it seemed as if nothing could go on without him.

The funeral was on the Thursday afternoon, and was attended by a great concourse of people, between thirty and forty cars taking their place in the procession, besides numbers of pedestrians. There would have been many more but for the dread of the fever. Some, indeed, of those who came on foot did not dare to walk in the road but kept parallel with the procession at some little distance on either side.

It is nice to be able to record that among the mourners were Monsignor Walker and his

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

three curates, who made a point of being present in spite of the fact that they were much engaged in a mission which was being held in their district at the time by four Jesuit priests.

One little circumstance is worthy of remark. Dr. Smyth's own favourite horse was an excitable animal, difficult to drive and impatient of any restraint. On the occasion of the funeral of one of his children Dr. Smyth had great work to control this horse on the way. But on this day the animal seemed to know that something was amiss. He allowed himself to be driven slowly and sedately the whole four miles to the churchyard where his master was to be laid.

The Royal Irish Constabulary acted as pall-bearers, and the service was conducted by the rector of Dunglow, the Rev. J. P. Conerney. He was laid to rest just within the entrance to the churchyard, and his six children lie at his feet. He lies beneath the shadow of the little church he loved so dearly and within a few yards of the sea shore, where the ripples of the water are ever lapping among the sea-weed and the stones, and where the sea-birds wheel and cry above the green grass of his grave.

But few words more need be said. Dr.

## HIS DEATH AND FUNERAL

Little has written at the close of his paper as follows :

“ Dr. Smyth was certainly thrown away at Burtonport. He was a thoroughly well educated man, his knowledge was real and available for the daily duties of his calling, and he never wanted presence of mind and readiness. I was always urging him to go somewhere else, but he loved the sea and the fishers, and it was no easy matter. . . .

“ My ambition was to secure his appointment as a Fishery Commissioner, a post for which he was admirably fitted. I had no interest, but I know that the Duke of Abercorn, who had made his acquaintance at Burtonport, exerted himself to the utmost, and probably when the next vacancy occurred might have been successful in securing his nomination.”

It is impossible not to recognise the high appreciation and friendship which caused such words to be penned. But—thrown away? Surely not. He lived a life for others. He did the work that lay before him in a way in which no other man will be found able to do it. He died, as he lived, for those whom he loved to call his friends. His example will live when

## A HERO OF DONEGAL

his children's children shall have passed away.

No wonder that the whole country has been stirred. Canon Rawnsley of Crosthwaite proposes that a granite memorial shall be erected at Burtonport. Many others have been labouring that in some small way the dear ones he has left may suffer less for his unselfish life and death. Please God it may help some of us in times of temptation and in moments of cowardice to recall the memory of William Smyth.

THE END

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